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ABSTRACT

A study of second language learning processes had three goals: to establish a grounded theory on the role of tension, both euphoric and dysphoric, in the formal language learning process; to provide a comprehensive ethnography of the 7-week intensive beginners' class in the French School of Middlebury College (Vermont); and to demonstrate how a well-designed and well-executed qualitative study can illuminate the language learning process. The first section gives an overview of the study and describes the Middlebury curriculum and the concepts of euphoric and dysphoric tension. After a review of related research, a series of research questions is explained and presented, and the study's methodology is described. Findings are then detailed concerning the school's learning environment, its program design and curriculum, learning processes, formal classroom opportunities for learning, student expectations, student personality changes during the Middlebury experience, and students' coping strategies. Theories emerging from the study are outlined, and recommendations and comments on the quality of tension, Middlebury's environment and formal curriculum, student placement and transfer, and the role of teacher-student dialogue in second language learning are offered. The French School's guide for beginning students is appended. Contains 26 references. (MSE)

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The Role of Euphoric and Dysphoric Tension in Language Acquisition:

An Ethnographic Study of the Beginners' Experience at the Middlebury College French School

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August 1995

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PREFACE

It seems predictable that an extensive study of the Middlebury Language School experience would elicit in the reader's mind the burning question: "Does it work?" However, to conclude that it does work is neither original nor satisfying, especially for the authors of this report who, as qualitative researchers, mostly wanted to know *how* it works. We thus proposed a seven-week comprehensive ethnography of French School beginners, with two participant observers collecting masses of data in interviews, observations and every available document we could gather, from the school's weekly gazette to videotapes of students at lunch, from official speeches and brochures to student compositions.

By its very nature, such an endeavor was bound to probe deeply into the heart of what is sometimes referred to as "The Middlebury Mystique," a somewhat romantic but powerful notion which accounts for --- but certainly does not explain --- why seven weeks in a small college in Vermont should arguably constitute the best language-learning experience there is. Although it was not our intention to demystify the Middlebury experience by dint of close scrutiny, we hoped to uncover some aspects of the secret with the curiosity of a child who takes apart a clock to understand why it ticks and keeps time.

The Middlebury Mystique rests on a mostly empirical knowledge that the program "works," with no specific understanding of why it works so *well*, and we were acutely aware of the unfortunate tendency in education to believe that a system works when nothing seems too terribly wrong with it, or when it seems to work better than the others. We also knew of the "leap of faith" principle, where educators assume simple causality between teaching and learning, and indeed we found that, although most of the students we observed did end up learning much, and more than they would have in another setting, it was not always because the immediate learning environment itself was ideal.

The purpose of this analysis must be comprehended in the perspective of Director Clara Yu's hope to give the Middlebury Language Schools "a role in providing a sorely needed national language resource." We can hardly prosose what Dr. Yu calls "a true Middlebury system in language teaching" as a model until we have more than an intuitive grasp on the reasons for its effectiveness.

"*Why* are we successful?" inquired Dr. Yu of us at the start of our research, "What are the characteristics and components that make us successful? That is why *you* are here! It is not enough to just proclaim success; we need to find out first whether it is indeed a success, and if not, why not, what can we do? If so, why so? And how can we leverage on this?"

"Why Middlebury works" would have been an overly ambitious research question, however, and the more specific study of pressure and tension seemed like a good place to start because if we knew anything for sure about the Middlebury experience, it was that a great deal of pressure was involved, with the target language-only pledge, the high academic standards and the sheer amount of work.

The beginners seemed like ideal candidates for the study, not only because we were already very familiar with their experience, but because they are likely the most pressured lot in the French School, with five hours of class a day (and often as many hours of work outside class) and with a minimal proficiency in a French-only environment. Naturally, higher-level students are under pressure as well, and we certainly do not dismiss their case; but, as French School Director Daniel Jourlait noted, the essence of the program remains language instruction.

In many ways, then, the beginners' experience is emblematic of the language learning process as a whole, and it may well have a decisive influence on an individual's future relationship with a second language and, perhaps more importantly, with the cultures that accompany it.

To respond to Dr. Yu's mission statement, as well as to remain true to our own standards and philosophical orientation, our study could not merely provide a description --- even a very detailed, ethnographic description --- of what we observed in the course of seven weeks. We needed to develop a theory, grounded in the data, on how and why students were experiencing tension, which could be perceived as pleasurable and stimulating (*euphoric* tension) or disagreeable and discouraging (*dysphoric* tension).

Although our purpose was not to study the pedagogical and didactical dimensions of the 101 and 201 courses, we often had to delve into these areas because they were the locus of much tension, euphoric as well as dysphoric. When we did so, our own background in pedagogy, curriculum theory and language education research provided a point of reference, a standard against which to gauge what we were witnessing; and the ethos of ethnographic research compels us to acknowledge this perspective clearly.

"Learning" to us is an interdisciplinary experience which can be facilitated and enhanced by a supportive educational system, and by teachers well versed in the principles of constructivist pedagogy, which aims to help student anchor new knowledge in previous experiences and understandings in order to construct reality and make sense of the world in mostly personal terms.

We thus see a philosophy of education as reflecting both humanistic and academic ideals: curricula and teaching should be determined in large part by the needs and interests of the students, with the strong guidance of an instructor who stands behind a body of academic knowledge that must become part of the students' repertoires in order for them to excel and thrive in a given cultural environment, without being bound to its limits.

Students are not placed in competition with each other, but are instead judged against external standards of quality and progress, and must take responsibility for this progress. Instructors, on the other hand, must be sensitive to both the affective and cognitive needs of the students, but without complacency; their goal is to facilitate and optimize learning by providing firm, yet flexible guidance.

The goal of such a philosophy is to strike a balance between the needs of the learners and the requirements of the culture in which instruction takes place, both the immediate culture of the educational institution and the society that surrounds it. All of our observations, even those on fairly technical issues, must be understood within this philosophical framework.

We wish to emphasize very strongly that our comments or critiques are not directed at a particular method or instructor, which can easily vary, but at the observable causes of euphoric or dysphoric tension. On several occasions, we discuss the role of a mechanistic, teacher-centered instructional model in promoting dysphoria, and contrast it with the role of a humanistic, student-centered, constructivist model in promoting euphoria. Indeed, many other models exist, but we had to ground our theory in what we observed in the summer of 1994. However, we do not seek to imply a cause-and-effect relationship between a particular instructional method and dysphoria or euphoria: it would be contrary both to our research paradigm and to our findings.

What we do take issue with is the concept of "method" as it is often construed in Foreign/Second language Teaching, because is perpetuates the so-called "factory model" of education which treats students as raw material, and teaching as a kind of industrial process which can be refined to yield a predictable, standardized product: learning. It seemed to us that the philosophy of the Language Schools is to encourage an independent, personally meaningful approach to learning, and that, if there is indeed a "Middlebury model," it certainly bears no relation to mass manufacturing.

Finally, we want to point out that all the quotes from our respondents were translated from the French. Since most of them were beginners whose syntax and morphology presented many flaws, we edited their comments for the sake of readability, and with careful attention to preserving their meaning. We also used pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Acknowledgements

An ethnography depends heavily upon the combined efforts not only of the researchers deeply involved in a setting, but upon the help, cooperation, and support of the occupants of the culture being studied. We would not have been able to carry out this project were it not for the concerted energies of the following people in facilitating our living and working conditions, and we are grateful for the opportunity of having gotten to work with them, as well as with our research participants.

First our thanks to Dr. Clara Yu, Director of the Language Schools and Vice President for Languages at Middlebury College, for her unflinching support, and for her belief in the importance of doing thorough ethnographic work in as favorable working conditions as possible. Her enthusiasm for qualitative research on second language acquisition has been transformed into reality in the form of this project, and we hope that it inspires further investigations into the Middlebury Experience in other language schools as well.

Without Beth Karnes, administrative assistant to the Language School Director, we would not have been able to so easily deal with the myriad practical details of data organization in the field, office space, materials, and dissemination of findings, and we are thus extremely grateful for her assistance.

We would also like to thank M. Daniel Jourlait, Director of the French School, for allowing us to closely study the inner-workings of the beginners' French courses; his honesty and insights regarding the Middlebury Experience provided us with invaluable, insider perspectives with which we were able to make sense of the data collected for this project. Our personal thanks also to Anne Jourlait for her continued interest in our work and for her insights in cross-cultural relationships.

Finally, a special word of appreciation must be reserved for the French School *débutants* and their instructors from the summer of 1994, who allowed us into their lives for seven weeks, and with several of whom we have happily maintained friendships since the official end of the session. These students --- many of them knowledgeable individuals, experts, and respected leaders in their own fields --- shared more about themselves in a foreign language than they ever believed, or we ever hoped, could be accomplished in fifty days.

I. INTRODUCTION

A) Importance of the study

Although lowering anxiety became a main issue in second/foreign language instruction after it was established that various form of negative affective reactions could severely hinder progress and achievement, the research in this domain has generally suffered from serious methodological and epistemological flaws. The first problem is an almost exclusive focus on "anxiety" (communicative apprehension, stage fright, test anxiety, etc.), i.e. the negative (dysphoric) effect of tension, with only passing interest in its positive (euphoric) effect.

A second, greater problem is research methodology, which has remained mostly quantitative, though the phenomena under consideration (anxiety, learning, achievement) cannot be quantified without gross reductionism. The complexity of statistical analyses is all too often undermined by simplistic instruments (grammatical manipulation, dictation, cloze exercises, etc.) designed to measure "achievement" or "proficiency," but which contradict the "communicative" philosophy of language education that those studies are meant to support.

In addition, most research tends to center on instructional variables and to draw specific conclusions on teaching methodology, without taking into account factors external to instruction *per se*, but crucial to the global learning experience. In so doing, they implicitly endorse a distinctly mechanistic philosophy of education, which conceives of learning as a mere product that can be improved by refining the means of production, i.e. the teaching method.

A third problem, beyond the boundaries of language education research, is that although qualitative methodologies are sometimes employed, they are not always well understood or well used, and thus yield inconclusive results that seem to be based more on pre-established hypotheses than on the grounded data.

Our project therefore had several goals: 1) to establish a *grounded theory* on the role of tension — both euphoric and dysphoric — in the formal language acquisition process, 2) to provide a valid research model in the form of a comprehensive ethnography of the 7-week intensive beginners' class in the French School of Middlebury College in the summer of 1994, and 3) to demonstrate how a well-designed and well-executed qualitative study could illuminate the process of formal language acquisition in a way that no quantitative study could.

B) The Middlebury pericurriculum

The Middlebury environment, particularly the French beginners' courses seemed to provide a unique setting for such research, because the instructional component is supposed to be inextricably interwoven with the global experience outside the classroom. Though few people can describe it with accuracy, the fabled "Middlebury experience" is known to rest not only on formal instruction, but also on "extracurricular" activities which are in fact as important to the uniqueness and success of the program as the academic curriculum *stricto sensu.*

Movies, lectures, plays, sports, parties and even meals not only afford students the opportunity to practice, in a naturalistic setting, what they have learned in class, but also help create an ambiance and spirit which, intangible as they may be, appear central to the Middlebury experience. We coined the word *pericurriculum* to describe this original dimension wherein the "Middlebury mystique" rests, a dimension that absolutely defies reduction to independent and dependent variables submitted for testing to a pre-existing theory.

C) Tension

The Middlebury experience is also known to create an unusually high level of pressure in and out of the classroom, through the language pledge and immediate full immersion, the rapid pace of instruction and the high expectations of teachers. This is all the more true for beginners who speak at best a few words of French when they arrive. Given the outstanding results of the program (both from the teachers' and the students' viewpoints), there is every reason to believe that at least some of the tension thus generated may be beneficial.

Yet, what we already knew about the program suggested that no correlational study would be revelatory, since in previous years some of the students who could, judging from all explicit indicators (grade, self-evaluation, teacher's praise), be said to have succeeded very highly, complained of dysphoria (during the course or in evaluations), whereas some apparently low-to middle-achievers had reported mostly euphoric circumstances --- or at least had not complained about any dysphoric ones, which, as we will see later, is quite a different matter.

In fact, one of the most remarkable insights afforded by the ethnographic format was to discover a wealth of affective and cognitive states which have a crucial incidence on a student's success (in the formal sense) and learning, but which go completely unreported and unheard in the institutional structure as it exists.

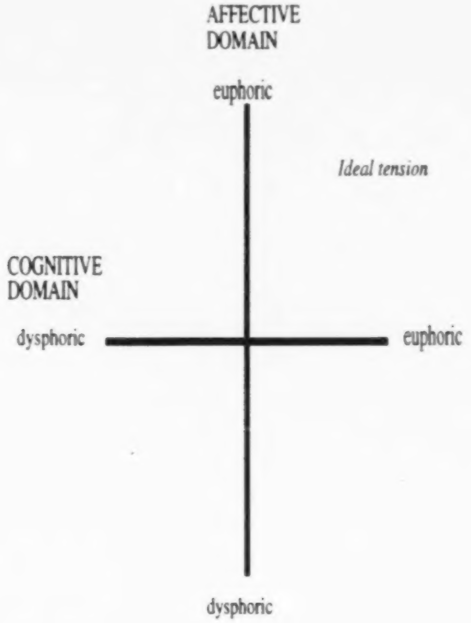
We originally used the terms of *eustress* and *dystress* (with *stress* as a neutral allomorph), but decided to shift to *tension* instead, first because *stress* generally carries a more negative connotation, but mostly because the adjectives *euphoric* and *dysphoric*, in their etymology, more accurately reflect our concept of tension as the result of numerous factors interacting. These terms, which we borrow from semiotic theory, are used to express the values, positive or negative, given (by an individual or a group) to a reality which has already been constructed to make sense in terms of cultural logic.

We discovered that any event or circumstance in and out of the classroom should not be regarded as essentially good or bad, but as susceptible to receiving any one of four thymic values (euphoric, dysphoric, non-euphoric or non-dysphoric) projected by an individual. This projection depends on the influence of several factors (personality, cultural background, social adjustment to the setting, etc.), but more specifically on individual expectations.

This concept turned out to be essential from a methodological point of view, because our data showed that the effects of a given factor on a given individual were far less predictable than could be assumed or calculated. In fact, the grounded theory which emerged suggested that the results of a teacher's efforts at "lowering anxiety" by manipulating those variables that are most commonly held to be dysphoric --- e.g., competitive atmosphere, repetitious exercises, stringent error correction (see Koch & Terrell 1991) --- could be equally unpredictable.

Furthermore, the logical articulation of the thymic category into four terms suggested that we look closely at the "subcontraries" (non-euphoria and non-dysphoria) which indicated an absence of tension, but an absence that was in itself meaningful. This schema proved useful in accounting for perceptions of students who wished to express what an event or circumstance was *not*, rather than what it was --- an important distinction, because it underscores that euphoria and dysphoria are not opposites, and that an event or circumstance which negates one does not produce the other.

In addition, we realized that tension or pressure had to be separated into affective and cognitive domains, which are not interchangeable, and that euphoria or dysphoria was specific to each domain. To the traditional bell curve model of the relationship between pressure and learning, we had to substitute a chart with two axes:


AFFECTIVE DOMAIN
euphoric
Ideal tension
COGNITIVE DOMAIN
dysphoric
euphoric
dysphoric

This model already pointed to an approach of tension which seemed radically different from what could be found in the literature on stress and anxiety in language education, as is shown in the following section.

II. RELATED RESEARCH

Long before it was validated by research, the principle that lowering anxiety should be a priority of foreign/second language instruction had gained considerable currency. Georgi Lozanov's (1970) suggestopedia proposed to help students recede to an infantile stage in order to remove the inhibitions that impeded fast and easy language acquisition, whereas Charles Curran (1976) infused some aspects of group therapy in his approach of Counseling-Learning.

Some twenty years later, Steven Krashen (1982) introduced, among five hypotheses on language acquisition, the "affective filter hypothesis", (stressful classroom environments turns off students from easy acquisition) and the "input hypothesis" (learners must be constantly exposed to language slightly above their level of competence, "i+1"), proposing in essence, though somewhat vaguely, to reduce dysphoric tension in the affective domain while raising euphoric tension in the cognitive domain. Since then, communicative teaching has attended ever more carefully to the first of these two objectives, and as Horwitz and Young (1991) state in their preface to *Language Anxiety*,

> For the past decade, questions about anxiety and language learning have emerged in virtually every aspect of language instruction... Teachers have long been aware of the fact that many of their students experience discomfort in the course of language learning [yet] researchers have been unable to establish a clear picture of how anxiety affects language learning and performance (p. xiii).

Such inability --- which, incidentally, is proven once again by the chapters that follow in the book --- is attributable to the exclusive concern for dysphoric tension (i.e.,"anxiety" or "apprehension"), and in part to the implicitly stated goal of finding cause/effect relationships or correlation between variables which are in fact neither well-defined (especially "learning," "performance," or "achievement") nor possible to isolate.

Research in this domain has been constrained by these and other biases, so that a review of related research must also be an epistemological critique of the research paradigm itself. In fact, the research studies so far have been inconclusive (Scovel, 1991), except in the vaguest of terms, and even these do not clarify the empirical perception of "debilitating anxiety" (Kleinmann, 1977) as detrimental to language learning, and of "facilitating anxiety" as potentially beneficial.

Typically, Foreign or Second Language Acquisition studies try to demonstrate, using the standard statistical apparatus (Means, averages, MANOVA, chi-square, correlation coefficients, etc.), that one instructional factor (e.g. explicit teaching of grammar, use of video, inductive methodology) has a measurable effect on student affect (Koch & Terrell, 1991), and thus potentially on achievement or proficiency (Young, 1991).

Although the statistical analysis is usually impressive and thorough, the method of data collection presents very serious problems. As exemplified for instance in Campbell and Ortiz' (1991) investigation of language anxiety, convergent questions and Likert scales on multiple-choice forms put words in the mouths of their respondents, whose answers are not truly their own, but have to fit a researcher-determined mold.

In addition, what respondents say can prove less important than *how* they say it, or than what they do *not* say, two dimensions which are completely obliterated in the questionnaire format, but which are essential to a semiotic and ethnographic understanding of the culture (of a classroom or an institution).

Moreover, the tendency of psychologically-oriented research has been to dwell on pathological or problematic states, which present readily observable or reportable symptoms, and disregard euphoric states, as if the only objective was to attenuate the negative, to the detriment of enhancing the positive --- and Kleinmann's (1977) oxymoric coinage of "facilitating anxiety" proves how ingrained this bias really is. In addition to exploring further the depth and breadth of learner anxiety, we need to elaborate better accounts and theories on such uneasily grasped states as "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988), when learning or creativity is not only effortless, but almost intoxicating in its facility.

A form of anxiety closely linked to the language learning experience is "communication apprehension" (CA), which has long been studied by psychologists (Daly, 1991). Although it can be measured by behavioral observation or physiological assessment, CA is generally assessed through self-reports (Daly, 1991), such as the McCroskey Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (McCroskey, 1984).

Unfortunately, the history of CA research has given a distinctly psychological flavor to the study of anxiety, which is presented as a mental state, and often a stable one (Daly 1987). We must insist, however, that tension as we conceive it is not merely a "learner variable", whether intrinsic or extrinsic (Scovel, 1991). It is, instead, a phenomenon produced by the interaction of factors which can only be grasped and understood within the whole instructional and institutional culture.

Such is the force of tradition in psychology that, "For the most part, research on this topic [situation-based apprehension] is preliminary; in many cases, what has been done is mostly theoretical" (Daly, 1991). Our ethnography, on the other hand, has yielded an abundance of empirical data on the occurrence of dysphoric tension.

When the question is asked, "How does language anxiety affect language learning?" (Horwitz and Young, 1991, p.1), several implied assumptions already limit the kind of research which can be conducted and the kind of answers which will result. Perhaps the most detrimental assumption is that the only type of anxiety worth studying is language-specific, as if the language acquisition process was predominantly affected by only language-specific factors (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1991).

This premise focuses the attention of the researchers on such parameters of instruction as types of exercise given to students on a test, with the implicit belief that changing exercises means changing one variable while others presumably remain constant (e.g. Masden Brown & Jones, 1991). The flagrant methodological flaw of such approaches is only compounded when the types of exercises given --- translations, dictations, grammatical fill-ins and manipulations --- are decontextualized and unnatural, and should certainly not be recognized as indicators of proficiency in the context of contemporary F/SLA research.

In spite of its obvious limitations, quantitative research has remained the preferred method of inquiry because of the prevalent positivistic belief in the exactness of "scientific" methods based on mathematical analyses, which alone, it was believed, were generalizable, and would thus hold universal validity. This is no longer the case, especially in the social sciences, as new approaches are being developed to allow for generalization from qualitative research as well (Firestone, 1993).

Though severely limited in its qualitative depth and methodological precision, Price (1991), in her "Subjective Experience of Foreign Language Anxiety: Interviews with Highly Anxious Students," recognizes that:

> Investigations of foreign language anxiety have been for the most part quantitative studies, primarily correlational research.... Results of these studies were not conclusive, perhaps because of the difficulty of measuring anxiety, as well as the fact that a number of different anxiety measures were used in the studies (p. 101).

This is even more true as quantitative studies typically attempt to find a correlation between anxiety and "achievement," a notion which is in and of itself the subject of much debate in educational theory. In order to treat achievement as a measurable quantity, researchers must reduce it to manipulable components, usually vocabulary and grammar, and in so doing undermine the validity of their own findings since communication is a far more complex affair than the mere manipulation of verbs and nouns.

However, despite Price's determination to avoid such obvious methodological pitfalls as "measuring" anxiety, she not only focuses on the dysphoric (without suggesting that euphoric tension may have a role to play, or even exist) but interviews only self-described "highly anxious students," implying that anxiety is a mental state and excluding in the process the voices of those who are not anxious (at least in a given situation), or those who may be anxious but do not openly acknowledge it.

Price's work provides a good example of well-meaning qualitative research which is unfortunately tainted by a faulty design: for instance, she posits not only that interviewing highly anxious learners will tell us more about stress than interviewing people who do not suffer from it, but that studying the negative will allow us to draw conclusions on the positive. The interviewees, who were selected on the basis of their self-confessed "language phobia," have little, if anything, to say about euphoric tension, and reflect extremes in dysphoric tension; their disastrous classroom experiences thus appear grounded in pre-existing anxieties which would have likely occurred regardless of instructional conditions. Moreover, the author notes that those not found to be anxious enough, and/or unwilling or unable to answer questions were not included in the study (p. 103).

Such weaknesses in qualitative methodology tend to reinforce the already entrenched positivistic bias in research. This is particularly obvious when results of a qualitative study are used primarily to buttress statistical findings, as if they could not stand on their own. For example, Brecht & Robinson (1993) display a strong temptation to use preliminary findings to immediately formulate hypotheses, which runs counter to the principle of grounded theory and therefore invalidates the research findings.

The frequency and magnitude of epistemological and methodological problems in the extant research suggested that we therefore avoid relying on models and findings proposed by others. As a result, we based the design of our study on the theoretically sound practices of ethnographic research in the social sciences (e.g. Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and on cultural semiotics (e.g. Greimas and Courtès, 1982). Consequently we were able to develop a theory grounded solely in the triangulated data and subjected to standards of trustworthiness as discussed in the Methodological section below.

III.RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A) Background

The original goal of this study was to discover a *grounded theory* on the role of both euphoric and dysphoric tension in the language acquisition process and on how and why students were experiencing tension in the French School of Middlebury College. Towards that end, we developed a series of research questions whose answers, when triangulated and analyzed, would yield a set of unprecedented, rich data upon which to build that theory.

Many of the questions emerged throughout data collection and analysis, as is consistent with qualitative research methodology; thus with methodological vigilance throughout the 1994 summer session, the researchers designed and developed data collection strategies that were consistent with and adapted to evolving situations within the research setting. The questions found below were thus used as guides, and not as formal survey instruments, in order to facilitate understanding of the previously-gathered data and to inform the search for the multiple realities within the setting.

Dr. Radnofsky asked students the first set of general questions (all in French) starting the first week of the session; the Pledge to speak only French was thus respected from the beginning, despite the fact that beginning students have two weeks before they are obliged to sign it.

The remaining questions emerged from responses from first questions, observations, and from initial coding of interview and observation data, as is consistent with qualitative data analysis strategies.

B) First Interview Questions (translated from French):

How are you?

Why did you choose to study French? Why at Middlebury College?

What did you expect from the courses here?

In your opinion, what is the best way to learn a language?

If you have already had experience learning another language, describe your experiences.

Before coming here, how many hours work did you expect to have outside class time every day? And now, how many do you have?

What do you think of *French in Action*?
--- your classes? (morning/afternoon)
--- your instructors?
--- the college?
--- Battell dormitory? Proctor Cafeteria?
In what Middlebury activities, if any, do you participate or plan to participate outside of class? (e.g. film, sports, chorale, theater, Cabaret, etc.)

Describe your personality for me. How do you see yourself?

In class, which types of activities do you prefer? Which do you not like?

In what circumstances do you understand the best? When do you understand not as well?

Describe for me two or three stimulating learning situations (that do not necessarily have anything to do with language learning).

Describe for me two or three stressful learning situations (that do not necessarily have anything to do with language learning).

In general, how do you react to stressful situations?

What do you usually do to deal with or reduce the stress?

C) Sample Emergent Questions

What is the nature of the interaction between students' profiles, learning, state of being, communicative competence and housing conditions?

What is the nature of student-student interactions and interactions with professors, and pericurricular activities? On both cognitive and affective levels?

What is the nature of the Middlebury environment?

What is the interaction between the curriculum and the pericurriculum?

How does the researcher interact with the different constituencies of the French School?

What are the physical conditions that define and/or constrain the classroom setting?

What is the nature of student classroom participation?

What data inform us about the setting?

What is the nature of the instructional style in each class?

How do students view the purpose of instruction? In class? Outside of class?

What is the interaction between student profiles and their expectations of instructors and instruction in class?

What are the instructors' views regarding the purpose of their in-class teaching and their overall roles at Middlebury?

What is the nature of the students' written and verbal linguistic competence?

How does a student's communicative competence in his or her native language play a role in communicative competence at Middlebury?

What is the role of *French in Action* in instruction and learning in the classroom setting And in a student's communicative competence and state of being?

When and how does learning at Middlebury occur?

How is learning defined by the students, teachers, administration?

What aspects of students' profiles contribute to or detract from their learning in this context?

What is the relationship between teaching and learning at Middlebury?

What did the students expect, and how does the actual curriculum correspond to those expectations?

What forms of support are available to the students to help them (e.g. interns).

What is the student's overall, cognitive, and affective state of being and how do these evolve during the 7-week session?

What is the interaction between students' profiles, housing and boarding conditions, The French School, the curriculum, *French in Action*, the classroom setting, instruction, learning and communicative competence, and metacognition with their state of being? Over time?

How do students deal with dysphoric tension at the moment? Over time?

What is the meaning of the wide range of beginning students' personal and professional backgrounds, educational experiences, family and friends relationships, sociability, work ethic, expectations, motivation for learning French, and personality?

How does perceived success or failure influence metacognition at Middlebury?

What is the role of the Middlebury environment in encouraging awareness of personality changes?

IV. METHODOLOGY

A) Introduction to Ethnographic Research

If we move beyond a mechanistic vision of language as a set of items (words, phonemes, morphemes) and of rules (syntax, morphology, phonology) and consider it in its pragmatic and semiotic dimensions, we are confronted with a remarkably complex phenomenon involving hundreds of codependent variables which are not merely cognitive, but which include the physical, physiological, psychological, cultural and social.

To even propose that some of these variables can be isolated in an experimental setting is epistemologically indefensible; yet, such work is prevalent in the positivistic research paradigm. Consequently, correlational and experimental studies on language acquisition are routinely funded, carried out and published.

In contrast, ethnographic research using qualitative methodology offers as complete a portrayal as possible of the mutually shaping factors influencing one another in a given environment, through a "thick description" of phenomena, human interactions and reactions within the culture, thus accounting for coexisting "multiple realities." In an effort to better understand such a complex environment, researchers have looked to Grounded Theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as a solution. This method of developing concepts, establishing "linkages" and thereby creating an understanding of their roles in the setting attempts to explicate the central phenomena under study.

The researcher must attempt to make sense of seemingly chaotic data with the understanding that both the complex interpretations and the data collection are guided by the continually-evolving comparisons and analyses that occur during the study. Further, the theory that evolves must be "conceptually dense," i.e. infused with multiple concepts linked in multiple ways. Finally, a close scrutiny of the data is absolutely essential in order to fully reveal "the amazing complexity of what lies behind, and beyond those data" (Strauss, 1987, p. 10).

Thus the need for a qualitative, ethnographic approach to this study is justified by the richness and complexity of the experience that we are trying to understand. The particularity of Middlebury's French immersion course is that the instructional component *per se* is inextricably interwoven with the global experience outside the classroom; they influence each other on social, linguistic, and psychological levels. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that: "No *a priori* theory could possibly encompass the multiple realities that are likely to be encountered" (p. 41) in such an environment. Such paradoxes underscore the impossibility of any testable correlational hypothesis, and reinforce the need for understanding this complex phenomenon qualitatively.

B) The Middlebury Ethnography

This ethnography encompassed the 7-week intensive beginners' (101) and false beginners' (201) classes of the French School of Middlebury College during the summer of 1994.

1. Researchers

Dr. Mary Radnofsky, (hereafter referred to as Mary) as a full participant observer in the Middlebury college community, was housed with other French School staff and thus interacted constantly with the French School students and faculty. Dr. Radnofsky is bilingual French/English, and was thus able to observe and interact with the students in and out of class, and conduct in-depth interviews with students and staff in French only. The purpose of gathering data from multiple sources was to obtain a "thick description" of the beginners' experience as non-speakers that are completely immersed in a French-speaking environment. These data were then triangulated to contribute to the establishment of the grounded theory that emerged from data analysis.

As one of two professors teaching French 101, Dr. Guy Spielmann (hereafter referred to as Guy) met daily with his students in class, interacted with them at all meal times, and at various academic, social, athletic, and cultural functions throughout the seven week-session. Both researchers, who had been spending their summers at the Middlebury Language Schools for the past five years, were already familiar with the workings of the French School, its faculty, administrators, and its atmosphere, and thus were in an ideal position to carry out this type of study.

2. **Informed Consent**

All students were informed of the study in writing and signed consent forms allowing researchers to observe and interview them during the 1994 summer session. Although all the students signed consent forms, one student verbally asked not to be interviewed formally, and was therefore only observed; however, informal discussions naturally occurred with the student at meal times and during other French School activities.

3. **Data Collection and Analysis Techniques**

Interviews were tape recorded using dictaphone audio and Hi-8 video equipment, and yielded approximately 90 hours of audio and video tape. Transcriptions were made of the audio portions, and have been analyzed according to qualitative methods of constant comparison (Strauss, 1987) through the use of *Chromacode* (Radnofsky, 1994). Data-gathering decisions in the field and those regarding analyses of those data often occurred simultaneously, though many analysis decisions were also made subsequent to the completion of the summer session. Details of data collection and analysis are found below.

Field data collection consisted of a palette of techniques: individual and group interviews, observation, participant-teaching (as Dr. Radnofsky has taught French for several years, she took on the role of teacher's aide during some class observations and outside of class); psychological strategies (including therapeutic active/reflective listening and devil's advocate role-playing); kinesics and proxemics, document analysis, and unobtrusive measures, all using some sort of drawn, written, audio-, visual, and/or audio-visual recording techniques.

Daily debriefings between co-investigators and with an off-site debriefer provided an opportunity for the researchers to discuss findings in terms of methodological and substantive issues, paths to pursue, possible theories, and questions that needed to be asked in return interviews or observations.

Throughout data collection and later during analyses, the researchers wrote and/or audiotaped extensive Field Notes to document all observations, interpretations, and questions. Field notes covered the following categories: Methodological Notes which describe procedures to collect or analyze data; Personal Notes which trace the researchers' own personal feelings, attitudes, concerns, anxieties; Research Notes which lead to other studies that may be similar or related to this one; Interview Notes which may be taken during or shortly after actual interchanges, and which help the researchers to reflect upon particular events occurring during the interview itself; and Theoretical Notes which reflect the researchers' thoughts and tentative development of a theory to explain the phenomena being studied.

All notes remain in hard copy, dated and organized chronologically in the possession of the researchers. Some notes also exist in soft copy on floppy disks. All original data and field notes are accessible only by the researchers in order to protect the identity of the students that participated in this research. Pseudonyms have been given to all students, and to all faculty with the exception of Dr. Guy Spielmann, who chose to use his real name since his natural role as instructor in the setting was incorporated into the research he conducted.

Data analysis involved alternatively the following three processes: 1) Induction, which leads to the discovery of a tentative theory or hypothesis; 2) Deduction, which forces the researchers to draw conclusions from the tentative theory and leads to further data collection and a reexamination of the data in an attempt at 3) Verification, the act of checking out early hunches against recorded, observed events, and with participants, to see if the developing "grounded theory" is indeed based in the actual data.

4. Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness of the findings was also an important activity that receives special attention in studies such as this. Issues of Credibility, Consistency, Neutrality, and Transferability are addressed according to standards established by Lincoln & Guba (1985) in the following manner: Credibility is established by showing that the multiple constructions of reality are well- represented through prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checks, and providing an audit trail. Consistency is established by showing that findings have been triangulated, are traceable through an audit trail, and have emerged in methodological and theoretical notes; no pretense of replicability is made. Neutrality is established by showing that the findings are indeed those of the participants, and have not been determined by the biases and motivations of the researchers; this is achieved through triangulation, an audit trail, a reflexive journal to identify the possibility of "going native," and case reporting using raw data. Transferability, also known as applicability, is established by providing enough "thick description" of the setting and its events so that the reader is easily able to apply appropriate findings to another context.

V. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

A) The French School at Middlebury College

The French School is a full immersion setting where, theoretically, all communication in and out of the classroom is conducted in French; yet, the physical environment remains essentially American, which allows students to function within familiar surroundings. The importance of a safe, predictable environment, should be particularly stressed: the infrastructure of the students' life is preserved, in spite of the constraints put upon it; at any moment, in case of emergency, one can step back into the United States. Even though the French School environment, as one student puts it "creates a kind of obsession, which is good," it is an obsession which can be alleviated, as the same student observed, by a few hours off campus now and then.

With few exceptions, students could pursue the kind of activities that normally contribute to their physical and mental well-being, without it becoming an issue and a struggle. Several enjoyed afternoons on the golf course, worked out in the gym, jogged and rode their bikes, played tennis or the piano, took nature walks, went shopping, hosted spouses or boyfriends/girlfriends or travelled to see them on weekends. Many brought their cars, and others discovered that they could go along for rides to Burlington, New York, Boston or Montreal. Two went flying in gliders, and one found a way to play the chapel's organ whenever he pleased.

Had these students been abroad, they would have found most of these activities very difficult, even impossible to pursue, or at least requiring significant effort and, very likely, expense. Although the students took this fact for granted and never remarked upon it, some of the French professors and their families voiced their amazement at the variety of activities available at no extra charge, or without extraordinary effort.

Nevertheless, the small-town, bucolic Middlebury locale seemed appealingly exotic to many students. When one of them said, "It's a good idea to go to another country to study a foreign language with an intensive method," Mary asked him whether he considered Vermont foreign; he answered: "The culture is different. Middlebury isn't exactly Europe, but it's certainly different from Chicago." One of his classmates, an executive from Pittsburgh, said that the setting was "incredible; not only beautiful, of course, but relaxing as well. I call it 'the Middlebury spa!'"

Even if Middlebury is not precisely a spa, it is a place where the students' basic physical needs are taken care of; at "club Midd" (as some tee-shirts proclaim), they are housed (often with roommates --- a situation which is seen as both euphoric and dysphoric, depending on the individuals involved), fed, protected, and given immediate access to the type of facilities they have come to rely on: nutritious food, phones, computers, medical care, psychological counseling, special interest support groups, laundromats, etc.

It matters little that these facilities sometimes fail to meet their standards (especially lodging); the only relevant point is that they are there, and that they provide a safely familiar background to day-to-day life --- and, most importantly, that they free the students' minds from the kind of worry which, in a truly foreign environment, could encroach upon their attention and deplete their energy devoted to intellectual pursuits.

Some would argue that the *in situ* struggle of daily life is the best learning experience of all, which may well be true for advanced students, but does not necessarily apply to beginners.

This explains the school's fundamental mission, as defined by Daniel Jourlait, the director:

> The courses where we exert the greatest and most lasting influence are, without a doubt, language courses. Middlebury is above all a language school; what we added on to that [in terms of Graduate School courses] is the icing on the cake.

What obviously distinguishes the Middlebury environment from a "real-life" setting is the wealth of scheduled pericurricular activities: lectures, films, plays, team sports, choir and folk singing, cabaret, study breaks. In fact, as mentioned above, these activities are part and parcel of the educational linguistic and cultural experience at Middlebury.

In his opening address every summer, M. Jourlait strongly encourages students to try and enjoy as many of the activities as possible, as long as it does not deter them from studying. When asked in an interview what he thought was the weakest point of the French school, he answered:

> I often regret to see that students do not enjoy, or *cannot* enjoy fully all of the secondary activities, such as films, music or sports, in order to enrich themselves culturally in a different way. Yet, I cannot blame them, if they have a paper to turn in the next day.

Such regrets show that these activities are really not secondary at all, but somehow part of the French School macro-curriculum, which surrounds the academic curriculum. The relationship between the formal academic curriculum and this pericurriculum will be explored in the next section.

B) The Middlebury Experience: Curriculum and Pericurriculum

The Middlebury pericurriculum is meant to have both cognitive and affective value. Its explicit function is to enrich the academic dimension of a student's experience, as well as to provide an outlet for fatigue and frustration, a fruitful distraction from academic study, which still offers some benefits in terms of cognitive achievement.

M. Jourlait's remarks in the previous section suggest that we should explore the integration of this pericurriculum with the formal curriculum in greater depth. Ideally, the two should be inextricably interwoven into a global "Middlebury experience"; in practice, however, we have found significant qualitative and quantitative variations in the way that students, especially the beginners, experienced the pericurriculum.

These variations very much reflected the profound differences between the 101 and 201 courses in 1994 which, in spite of their superficial similarities in terms of schedules and materials, actually represent fundamentally opposite curricular philosophies and didactic approaches. Although these differences will be discussed in greater detail in the next section of this report, a brief outline here will clarify the point.

The 201 (false beginners) curriculum was closely modeled on *French in Action*, which offers a 52-episode video series, a textbook, a workbook, a study guide, a teacher's guide and audiotapes. *French in Action* is what Posner (1995) calls an "instructional package," a full set of materials with its own "method" which is designed to be "teacher-proof," i.e. followed to the letter so that even the most inexperienced instructor can deliver it.

Upon close scrutiny, the "Capretz Method" turns out to be a compromise between the "direct method" of the 1940's (a thematic and L2-only approach to traditional, grammar-driven instruction) and the Audio-Lingual (ALM) approaches of the 1960's and 70's, with their linguistics-influenced pattern drills. As a result, it is an essentially mechanistic approach based on imitation, role-play and drills, although it does not openly focus on grammatical structures, but conceals them in a theme-oriented narrative about a young American's adventures in Paris.

The 101 (full beginners) curriculum bore no resemblance to the *French in Action* or "Capretz Method." The video series was only used it as a pre-text, a contextualized introduction of communicative situations, cultural information, vocabulary, and structures. The drills, role-plays and exercises had been replaced by communicative activities, often conducted in small groups, and which were essentially constructivist in nature; most involved the use of visuals and/or authentic documents brought in by the instructor.

In the 101 course, the students were explicitly encouraged to explore the learning approach which best suited their needs, and to pursue personal interests as a means of naturalistic language acquisition. In the initial presentation and in the Beginners' Guide (See Appendix), students were told pointedly that all pericurricular activities are as much part of the curriculum as the class itself. Since lab work was optional, students had power of decision regarding the use of their study time. In addition, half of the assessment procedures --- weekly personal interviews and "*journal*" (a sort of diary and scrapbook) --- required no specific study, and could be used as vehicles to reflect students' experiences in the pericurriculum.

By contrast, the 201 curriculum demanded that all students strictly follow the "Capretz Method," which includes extensive individual repetition-and-drill sessions in the language lab. Except for compositions, assessment was method-driven and convergent, requiring specific study. Lab work could easily take up three to five hours each day, which severely curtailed the time available for pericurricular activities and literally isolated students in a booth, thus depriving them of two essential elements of the Middlebury experience: spontaneous, naturalistic communicative opportunities, and socialization, both of which, as we will see, have a strong influence on general well-being and on linguistic improvement.

Not surprisingly, having to spend hours alone listening to tapes (of often poor audio quality) was a major source of dysphoric tension for the 201 students; the fact that the exercises were mostly repetitive, mindless decontextualized drills only made the problem worse. In fact, one of the reasons why lab work with the *French in Action* tapes was made optional in 101 a few years ago was that many students had remarked that their time would be far better spent on other, more constructive types of activities.

In 201, where the "Capretz Method" remained essentially unchallenged, students showed an attitude of unhappy resignation. One of the greatest achievers of the class told of having made a choice:

> Mary: Did you enjoy other activities here?... Didn't you go to shows or plays?
> Oliver: No, that's right. It's really sad.
> Mary: Why?
> Oliver: Because I like doing all this, I like going to movies, to plays, all these activities, I like going to a soccer game... but the primary reason for being here is learning French. And I can tell you, for seven weeks, it's been hell.
> Mary: You say this so calmly: "It's hell." And you're reading [Jean-Paul Sartre's play] *Huis Clos* --- don't forget that sentence! So, do you accept the fact that it is hell here?...
> Oliver: Hell, I mean, hell, it's because we must study so much. But I knew what it was going to be like.... But things like shows or movies, for example, I mean, in

> general, they are not very useful.
> Mary: Not very useful? Why not?
> Oliver: First of all, because we can't understand much. ...And we have to choose; and if I have a choice between spending two hours at a movie or listening to tapes, I think I am at a level now where listening to tapes may be more useful.
> Mary: Don't you think it also depends on the individual?
> Oliver: Well, yes, but I think that generally it holds true for the 101 and 201 students.

In the testimony of this very determined young man, we hear a conviction that lab work, no matter how unpleasant and apparently pointless, was indispensable --- although he became so disillusioned with *French in Action* from the very first week of class that he devised a system to teach himself French, which he pursued in addition to the imposed curriculum. We also hear a belief that *all* beginners were submitted to this "hellish" regimen, which is of course erroneous since the 101 students were not, but it goes to show how this situation is presented as a *fait accompli* in the context of the "Capretz Method."

The belief, though, that, for a beginner, time would necessarily be wasted on a movie goes against both the spirit of the Middlebury experience and the most recognized principles of language acquisition. On the same subject, a 101 student, with equal determination and serious attitude towards his work, but a lower linguistic level, spoke differently:

> Max: I live in a city, a large city... and in Middlebury, there isn't much [to do]. But it is okay with me because I have one objective, to learn French. I don't care about going to Mr. Up's [local drinking establishment]; I don't care about golf...
> Mary: So, you have no distractions.
> Max: Yes, Middlebury is good, because there are no distractions.
> Mary: Yes, well, there are a few distractions, such as movies...
> Max: Ah yes! I think movies are very good for learning French. It's no distraction; I think it is part of the course in general.

"The course in general" is seen here as comprising both the formal curriculum and the pericurriculum with no real partition; indeed, if we were to qualify the uniqueness of the Middlebury experience, we would single out this smooth blending of classroom instruction with experiential learning. It should be noted that this student was not entirely pleased with the class itself, as indicated in his final evaluation, because he found the instructional method unadapted to his learning style; however, the pericurriculum gave him the "flexible" approach he wanted.

By and large, students in 101 took advantage of the Middlebury pericurricular activities and opportunities, and tended to consider them both part of the Middlebury experience --- as well as a way to cope with it. Max, an avid tennis player, gave lessons or played matches with many students from all levels. He commented on how he loved teaching tennis, because:

> With one little thing that you change, you can play a lot better in the first hour. And I've learned lots of words on the tennis court: Go for it! Over there! On the line, the head of the racket, forehand, backhand, the alley.... I can't learn all that in a classroom!

To him, watching movies and playing tennis naturally became part of the learning experience.

Such seemless integration of the pericurriculum was demonstrated vividly when a group of five 101 students decided to write and perform a song on their Middlebury experience, "The Beginners' Blues," for the Cabaret, the end-of-session talent show. As Deborah described it in her *journal*:

> First, we had to find a tune. That was easy.... But lyrics were another story. We had to describe the sorrow of a beginner's life. We wrote a line about the video that is so boring. We wrote a line about long hours in class. Then, we wrote a line about a pronunciation exercise, "*Am Stram Gram*..." It is not exactly easy to find rhymes in a foreign language, when one has a limited vocabulary. Fortunately, many words rhyme with ***débutant***: for instance, ***dégoûtant*** [disgusting], ***présent***, ***enfant*** [baby], etc. In fact, the most difficult part was rehearsing. I could not recall the words I had written. We rehearsed every day after class. And every time, someone forgot something.... The show was magnificent.... Our piece was in the second half of the show. It went very smoothly. Everybody laughed. I learned a lot at the French School. But if every night had been a Cabaret, I would have learned even more!

We can see how this activity, which was entirely student-initiated, offered many benefits: it allowed beginners, who spoke no French six weeks before, to literally showcase their achievements --- and artistic talents --- in front of all their schoolmates. They were immensely proud when their witty song brought down the packed house in laughter and applause.

On the other hand, the "genesis" of the song (as Deborah discussed in her *journal*) was in itself a rich heuristic experience: the students had to really play with the language to write lyrics that would be comical and descriptive of their experience, but also that would conform to the French rules of prosody and rhyme.

The well-publicized availability of pericurricular activities had virtually no impact on 201 students: they were in large part prevented from attending them, if only by the amount of homework, which was not related in any way to the general school environment; these repetitions and drills focused on the "method" and the storyline of *French in Action*, and as such was mostly convergent towards classroom exercises and exams. With the exception of playing soccer for a few of them, and performing a speechless part in one of the shows for one young woman, there was little 201 participation in pericurricular activities for most of the session, including purely passive ones like attending plays or movies.

There is even more to the pericurriculum than the organized activities listed on the weekly schedule, and most notably the opportunities to socialize and communicate in French with a variety of people from the entire community. For beginners, this is --- theoretically --- a chance to interact with more proficient speakers; as Janet, a 201 student bluntly put it, "I learn more French when I converse with people who speak well than when I speak to my classmates," whereas Robert remarked "I have learnt more French in Battell [dorm] at night than I have in the classroom." A female 101 student also remarked:

> Carol: I don't like speaking with other beginners after class, especially with Hank.
> Mary: Because he can't speak too well? Because his level in French is really low?
> Carol: I avoid saying it, but that's what I think. I felt that the other beginners are not any better than I am, so, um why speak with someone if I don't benefit from it? I chat with graduate students, since I understand every word, almost.

Although a few enterprising beginners actively sought to forge relationships with students at higher levels such as graduates or even faculty members, cross-level communication was far from easy. There is an implicit belief in the Middlebury system that communal living in the dining hall, the dorms and other public spaces will naturally translate into communication between different ability groups. We discovered, however, that there exist very clear, but invisible, boundaries which tend to confine students of the lower levels to socialization within their own group.

A few years ago, a 101 student had pointed out that one of the greatest obstacles for beginners was isolation, caused by the almost total lack of speaking ability in the initial two weeks, when most relationships form. There have been attempts to "jump-start" the process through a mentoring system (similar to the one used in the Spanish School), but the results have thus far been less than satisfactory, and clearly more work needs to be done in this area.

In fact, the desire to establish friendships and relationships right away was so compelling that it became a strong incentive for some students to fall back into English, because, as Janet pointed out:

> I think the pledge is very good, to speak French all the time, [but] a lot of people don't respect it completely and I understand, because it is very frustrating to speak French with people you don't know yet. When you have just arrived here, and you don't know anybody.... yes, to find friends: that's the reason why many people break the pledge.

Some traditional Middlebury practices further aggravate this problem; in her opening speech, the dean told beginners to sit together at meals for the first two weeks, so as not to "tempt" those who had already signed the pledge. Even the dean was obviously not aware that the last thing these students needed --- or wanted --- was to be ostracized for the critical first two weeks, nor was she aware that most 101 students did their very best to avoid English from the start, and that some would even sign the pledge well before the scheduled date.

Throughout our research, it seemed that the philosophy of stoic acceptance embraced by the French school tended to dismiss a number of human needs expressed by the students, certainly not out of insensitivity, but with the realistic attitude that they simply could not be fulfilled for logistical reasons. Students were told that they would suffer (from the heat, from mosquitoes, from cramped housing conditions, from difficult work) and that they should simply grin and bear it --- as if telling them openly would simply dispel whatever dysphoric tension these hardships could produce. Although it would be inadvisable --- and in many cases, purely impossible --- to act upon every student's complaint, the *a priori*, blanket dismissal of all predictable complaints may have dire implications on learning, if individuals find that their basic needs for comfort and security are not met, or, more importantly, not taken into account (Maslow, 1943).

The point seemed to be that students wanted to know that their expressions of concern were being listened to and considered seriously, even if, eventually, no concrete step could be taken to address them. Having a voice became part of their desire to be treated as intelligent adults with well-formed personalities, rather than like children.

The problem surfaced in an unexpected way in 101 after four weeks of class, when one of the most outstanding students refused to carry out an assessment procedure which required an interview with a native speaker. He said that this assignment made him very uncomfortable because he did not know a native speaker personally, and that he felt it would be an imposition on the interviewee.

Later, he explained to Mary that his status as a beginner made him feel very self-conscious:

> Philip: It's very difficult, you know; not particularly because I lack speaking ability, but because I don't know how much I can ask from them. And it seems obvious that, with graduate students, one meal a week...
> Mary:..Is already enough?
> Philip: Yes, and I can't blame them. They're right.
> Mary: Oh? They are justified in not speaking with you because you are a beginner? Because you don't know enough French?
> Philip: Not exactly, not because they don't want to speak with us, but because they want to speak with others, others who are in their classes, who are capable. Social interaction is impossible when you speak at our level. That is simply a fact of life for the beginners!
> Mary: When you talk with people, you don't want to impose on them?
> Philip: Yes, with teachers for instance: it's true that most teachers and graduate students here are very open... er, I am looking for a word with "will."
> Mary: They have a lot of good will, they are patient?
> Philip: The opposite of "to refuse"?
> Mary: They are generous with their time.
> Philip: Yes, but at the same time, it is obvious that we are a charity, and that they'd rather speak with others who... speak better French.

A 201 student echoed this concern in almost identical terms:

> Mary: Do you know any graduate students here, with whom you talk, here or at the dining hall?
> Robert: Yes, I know a few of them, but I don't think it is very amusing for a graduate student to speak with someone who, how should I say? I think they'll sit with you for 10 or 15 minutes, but after that it gets boring; it gets a little embarrassing (mimics a person nervously brushing his hair, laughs).

Thus while the apparently casual commingling of all students and faculty in the dining hall and other communal spaces creates the illusion of open communication, rigid but invisible boundaries actually separate the various groups within the school, and the beginners' communicative space is actually much smaller than what could be expected.

Among students, for example, professors are notorious for sitting together or with advanced graduate students at meals, which are supposed to be the prime time for casual interaction. One of the interns spontaneously remarked one day:

> It really annoys me how teachers stay among themselves; most of them do, you know... they are paid to be here, and students have paid a lot of money, and really, if it weren't for [cites names] and a few others...

In our observations, we also found that actual communication opportunities for beginners were very limited, except for a few extremely outgoing individuals who felt they could approach anyone on campus, from graduate students to teachers' children, and who reported very fruitful relationships in social as well as linguistic terms. It must be emphasized, though, that these were glaring exceptions.

On the other hand, those who tended to be less extroverted clearly felt that, in light of the many obstacles involved, attempting to communicate with faculty or students from other levels was either not a worthwhile investment or too intimidating an endeavor to undertake. Even the ones who were academically strong and who used considerable self-monitoring, turned out to be particularly ill at ease in cross-level communication. In French, they were acutely aware of their linguistic limitations, despite the fact that they reported being quite sociable, even overly talkative in their native language.

In the absence of any facilitating structure, most beginning students thus felt that communication with schoolmates from other levels and faculty, which could theoretically be a source of euphoric cognitive and affective tension, was mostly dysphoric in practice, and they avoided it as much as possible. A returning graduate student, a charismatic high school teacher considered by her peers to be exceptionally outgoing, said, "I feel a great deal of sympathy for people who are timid here, especially in a foreign language. When people remark on how many people I know on campus, how many professors, I almost feel like apologizing."

For those students who are timid, or not particularly outgoing, the initial promise of the Middlebury experience remains unfulfilled. Here again, the mere injunction to go out and make contact with as many people as possible, which students hear over and over when they arrive, quite apparently does not in and of itself make all inhibitions magically disappear.

C) Learning

As many other potential obstacles, however, the isolation and limited contact with graduate students and professors was very much taken in stride by beginners and did not *necessarily* affect their learning, since students had generally accepted that a modicum of unpleasantness would be involved. As Philip, one 101 student put it, "we must suffer," echoing M. Jourlait's pronouncement in his opening speech that no one has so far found an easy and pleasant way of learning a language. A 201 student, Tim, concurred:

> It is not much fun, but it's not the worst; I can't imagine another way of learning that is better than this. I think that the philosophy of the system isn't pleasant; it isn't fun, but it works. And ultimately, all the problems and everything I don't much like is part of the philosophy; it is a mixed bag. But if it works, okay.... But it's not for the faint hearted here.

We know that the uniqueness of the Middlebury experience for beginners is based on a principle of putting students under pressure through the immersion environment, the high standards and expectations, and the sheer intensity of the course. This situation potentially generates strong dysphoric and euphoric tension which is acknowledged every year; but although students are encouraged to take advantage of the situations in which they may experience euphoria (e.g. The Pledge, acting in a play, singing in the chorale), they are merely warned about the impending difficulties and discomfort they will suffer. This creates an imbalanced situation, since in the first case the outcome depends on their active involvement, but in the second case the situation appears entirely beyond their control, and the only suggested response is passive resignation.

This approach is partly justified, however, as it is, of course, impossible to accommodate the every whim of the students. Our research found that there are as many complaints as there are students; to try and address them all would be a self-defeating endeavor --- and in many cases, many of the problems were beyond the school's power to solve anyway (e.g. insects, construction noise outside, heat, etc.).

Nevertheless, findings from this research indicate that circumstances which produce dysphoric tension for most people could be fairly easily affected. For example, while all the students praise the Pledge to speak only the target language as being instrumental in their success at learning French, and although the school is justified in seeking to enforce it, we must also realize that one of the most dysphoric experiences reported by beginners was to feel infantilized in front of students and instructors, and to be unable to project their "true" personality because of linguistic limitations. (The issue of personality changes will be treated at length in Section F below.)

The feeling of infantilization was not unique to beginners, we recognize; even an articulate and experienced graduate student remarked that at times, "You feel absolutely stupid, an idiot, and that *everyone* can speak better than you." This attitude was exacerbated at the beginners' level, where students complained of not being able to speak in class because they knew that whatever came out of their mouths would have something wrong with it. Carol, one young woman in 101 exclaimed, even after four weeks of class:

> In French I am very frustrated, because other people think I am stupid, since I make short sentences and my pronunciation is bad. This is not me. It is me in French. [My new friend] only knows me in French, not in English. I am so different; perhaps he would not even like me in English.

As other students have already noted, it is upon discovering common interests, forging friendships, telling stories, and thus establishing a basis of mutual respect, that such feelings of ineptitude are, in part, alleviated. However, in the case of beginning students who have virtually no French and must depend upon mostly non-verbal communicative strategies, this task is all but impossible with anyone other than those suffering the same plight.

The speed of their conversational French seems, at first, painstakingly slow to more advanced and native speakers, and both professors and graduate students have explained the need for considerable patience with beginners, despite the rapidity of their progress throughout the session. Unfortunately, very few take the time to get to really know them, and thus the majority of the beginning students are further isolated from the intellectual stimulation resulting from social interactions around them.

In fact, one of the most surprising findings of our research has been the discovery of the illusion that all students have equal social access to the rest of the community; instead there appears to be unequal access to the Middlebury experience for lower level students. When this obstacle was overcome by a very few beginners, it was because of an individual's own ingenuity, personality, experience, and the absolute psychological need to become part of a community. While many students do not express this urge as strongly as others, our findings have indicated that a fuller participation in the Middlebury experience --- that is, taking advantage of pericurricular activities and interactions --- seems to enhance the student's quality of learning and overall satisfaction with the program.

D) Curricula and Instruction in French 101 and 201

As mentioned above, the curricula in the two levels of beginning French classes in 1994 varied greatly, though in both we saw examples of outstanding learning as well as examples of very limited achievement. While *French in Action* was used in both courses, vast differences in teaching styles, assignments, requirements, and evaluation methods could be found among the four instructors, and even within a given course. As a result, we noted the following situations that characterized beginners' formal classroom experiences.

1. Opportunity for Self-Expression in the Classroom

One of the issues that clearly came into focus because of the severe problems with one of the 201 teachers was the lack of opportunity for self-expression *within* the formal course, which would have normally remained undetected because of the myriad opportunities for self-expression *outside* the course. Although the students, in keeping with the "Capretz method," had to compose orally and in writing some variations on the *French in Action* storyline, they were given relatively few chances to use their newly learned language to express themselves on a truly personal level --- although, exceptionally, interviews related to this project gave all students the opportunity to do so in abundance.

By contrast, the 101 students had both a semi-formal weekly interview with their teachers, lasting about fifteen minutes, and a *journal* in which they wrote weekly entries. These two activities, which represented a significant portion of their grade, allowed them to explore very personal, affective and intellectual concerns. Students could tell their teachers about themselves, their families, their friends, their lives --- and quite often about the course itself, as well as their own experiences with it, both euphoric and dysphoric.

The development of interviews and the *journal* evolved some years ago in response of the students' perception of even "communicative" classroom activities as being somewhat artificial in nature, and therefore failed to satisfy their need or desire to share truly meaningful information with classmates or instructors, despite the fact that the assignments were usually carried out satisfactorily.

Thus was established, *within* the 101 instructional structure, a place for self-expression which also served as a place for communication between students and instructors. The double outlet of the interview and the journal was designed intentionally to have few rules: students were asked to "showcase" their current level of proficiency in French, but the choice of topics and the format for oral or written presentation was entirely theirs.

Results were extremely varied, and the *journaux* consisted of actual diary entries, annotated scrapbooks, serialized fiction and non-fiction narratives, autobiographies, mini-plays, essays or aimless musings. Interviews were only semi-structured: the instructors, both Guy and Gaby, asked some divergent questions (usually about the student's activities of the past few days, professional interests, or taste in film, sports and hobbies) to launch the discussion, and then let the interviewee take over.

In a very small number of cases when students had extraordinary difficulties, the question/answer format continued for the whole session. However, the general trend was for the interview to turn into a genuine give-and-take situation, where the interviewees would speak unprompted, and even assume the lead and interview their instructors.

Although the atmosphere was very deliberately informal --- weather permitting, interviews were held under a tree, in Adirondack chairs, and Gaby was especially helpful in putting the students at ease --- they knew that they were being judged, but reported and exhibited no signs of dysphoric tension (even though, exceptionally, they were being taped for the purposes of this project). Students often commented at the end of their interviews, "Is that it? That's all? That wasn't hard! Can't I stay a little longer?" clearly demonstrating euphoric tension.

A few summers ago, their predecessors had reported dysphoric affective tension in that the interview made them feel quite nervous because they assumed that they had to "perform," to "put on a show" and impress their teachers. Consequently, in subsequent years, the interview was more specifically defined in the preliminary meeting, where it was established very explicitly that no dog-and-pony show was expected, and that it was even possible to come with a topic and lead the discussion, rather than passively wait to be questioned.

As a result of the clarification regarding the openness and divergent structure of the interviews, students have stopped reporting dysphoric tension other than fleeting nervousness, and have even started enjoying the interview as an opportunity to communicate with their teachers. To have the undivided attention of their instructors for fifteen minutes at a time allows students to delve into more involved and personal topics and take the time to express complex ideas, whereas such time-consuming material is appropriate to neither the pace nor format of classroom instruction.

The lack of a similar opportunity for the 201 students was somewhat compensated for by out-of-class informal contact with Charlotte, as well as by the presence of the researcher who interviewed them on a regular basis once every other week, and who was present daily at meals and French School activities. Although students could have reasonably been expected to balk at having to take time away from an extremely busy schedule --- and several did initially express concern about time expenditure ---, many eventually requested to stay and talk for much longer than the scheduled time of 15-60 minutes. In fact, several of the sessions with 201 students extended beyond two hours, and, in a remarkable shift of roles, students quickly began seeking out the researcher and asked when they could be interviewed again.

These interviews could not be considered as convenient venting outlets or bull sessions, since they were conducted entirely in French. Anyone familiar with language teaching knows that, within the scope of instruction, it is quite painstaking to draw out of beginning students more than a few minutes of speech. We discovered, however, that those same students were not only willing, but eager to talk for extended periods of time and, perhaps more importantly, that they sometimes did so at a level of eloquence incommensurate with what they demonstrated in class.

2. Teacher-Centered or Student-Centered Classrooms

a) French 201

Fundamental to the nature of instruction, of course, is the way in which a teacher organizes the classroom structure --- around his/her own knowledge or around emergent student learning. A teacher-centered classroom is defined not only as one in which a teacher does most of the talking (although this is usually the case), but as one in which the central activity, very often questioning, is conceived and directed by the teacher. Typically, most communication occurs between the teacher and a student; very few student-student interactions take place, and if they do, it is only because they have been sanctioned as part of teacher-driven curriculum, failing which the teacher is usually quick to intervene.

In the 201 classroom, instruction was very clearly teacher-centered, so that the normal mode of speech was a short, convergent student response to a teacher prompt. This is both a typical feature of traditional instruction and a function of *French in Action*, which is dominated by the ever-present figure of the author lecturing from his desk in the video. The program uses amusing characters to appear humanistic and to cover the formulaic nature of its teaching style; yet all lessons are convergent in their vocabulary, patterns, usage, grammar exercises, and storyline. Student predominantly engage in repetition and drill, memorization of vocabulary and rehearsing of dialogues and scripts with variations; the fact that they are sometimes encouraged to volunteer personal information or tell stories does not affect that basic structure.

While pretending to be humanistic, *French in Action* violates one of the prime tenets of this philosophy: it allows for little or no learner-initiated variation in form, and casts the teacher as the central authority figure, which is symbolically played out by its designer, Professor Capretz himself, who occupies much of the teaching space on the TV screen. In fact, when a 101 instructor asked his class, "Who is the hero of the story?" expecting to elicit the character's name of Robert, one quick-witted young man snapped back, "M. Capretz!" Not surprisingly, the "method" favors almost exclusively one-on-one teacher-student interchanges, except in skits (which we discuss later on in this section).

Furthermore, observations of 201 showed that, especially in the afternoon classes, talk time was virtually monopolized by a minority of male students with an aggressive communicative behavior, at the expense of more reticent students, mostly female. As evidenced in some classroom observations, the less confident students literally did not utter a word, and more generally only spoke when called upon by the instructor:

> Mary: I saw you in class when I came to observe, and you hardly ever speak.
> Miriam: Yes, but I am timid in front of a group. I hate acting in front of a group of people.

Yet, these apparently withdrawn students proved to have much to say, and in an often surprisingly sophisticated manner, when given the time, opportunity and attention in interviews for this research. A young woman who would, in later interviews, provide a thorough and insightful analysis of the Middlebury experience, with the help of judicious literary allusions, spoke little or not at all during class:

> Mary: Do you have a tendency to speak much?
> Leslie: Oh yes! (Laugh) But here I find that I don't speak often, because it's difficult. I think I don't pronounce very well. I am afraid of speaking, because I think I don't speak perfectly.

One after another, the female students in 201 demonstrated that they had indeed much to say, but didn't, because of the strong feelings of anxiety associated with speaking in class.

Educational research literature has well documented the prevalence of unconscious gender bias in American classrooms, when it comes to teacher's expectations of how much female students will achieve, and to the attention they receive. What occurred in 201 was typical --- although both instructors were women --- because a teacher-centered curriculum tends to exacerbate the differentiation of gender roles.

The related problem of dysphoric tension generated by convergent questioning resurfaced on a regular basis:

> Mary: I am surprised to hear you speak so fluently, very naturally, and I've never heard you utter a complete sentence in class.
> Nellie: In class, it is very, very difficult, because there is always a specific question, and a specific answer. And from time to time, I panic, because I don't understand the question, or I'm afraid that I'll be wrong, that my answer is wrong.
> Mary: Do you talk to the professor?
> Nellie: Yes, I do.
> Mary: In or out of class?
> Nellie: In class, because she wants --- [pulling motions from the mouth]... she lways looks at me [laughs], and "pulls the words out of my mouth."

Although it might appear at first that such "word pulling" was the right thing to do, this student's natural talkativeness during the interview proved that she would not have needed any coercing at all, if the communicative situation in class had been more conducive to spontaneous expression. In this class, all of the female students except one described feelings of hesitation to speak in front of the entire class, even with classmates they claimed to like, and despite the fact that they felt quite comfortable with Charlotte:

> Iris: In a situation when there is a group of people, I don't talk.
> Mary: Do you know why?
> Iris: Sometimes I don't know the answers. Normally the men in the class are more aggressive than the women, and I can't insist. Also, I don't have a very strong voice, and I don't want to scream. It is not my style.

Much of the problem rests on the belief that the well-known motivation of Middlebury's language students necessarily translate into an uninhibited willingness to speak up and communicate. However, we heard young men and women confessing to a full palette of communication apprehensions, from simple timidity and error anxiety to numbing stage fright.

That these inhibitions should plague the majority of students in a class cannot be dismissed as a random occurrence. As educators, we have remarked the same phenomena accompanied by dysphoric tension at various levels, with different populations and across all various subject matters. Though certainly not the only factor contributing to the students' reticence, not allowing them a personal choice in the nature of their contribution seemed to be a strong disincentive for many of the 201 students.

This reluctance was illustrated in a communicative exercise conducted one morning after the video episode. Although most of the class complied with the instructor's entreaty to tell a personal story about a dangerous or horrible experience, Mary's field notes show that forcing everyone to tell such a story did not have the desired effects on all the students, although the observation reflects the professor's good intentions to include everyone in the class:

> Field Notes: First Sam's story. Charlotte interrupts to explain stuff frequently. Then Victor, then Roger. I wonder if Robert is going to tell one of his amazing stories of risk and adventure. Then Oliver and Walter. Everyone is listening intently...

When Mary later asked Robert why he hadn't told any of his remarkable stories, he answered:

> I think that I am afraid of giving the impression that I am bragging about things that I do. And when I do tell one of these stories, which is rarely, and unless it is necessary to the story, I don't say the name of the people and of the places. Some people have done more than I have, some people have done less, and anyway, it is something I only do for myself.... I know the feeling towards those who brag about their experiences, and I don't want to be seen that way.

In this case, the student's reticence did not originate in communicative apprehension, but in his sensitivity to the social environment. In another case, a female student who did not want to tell a story either, but who could not find it in herself to refuse, was placed in a very uncomfortable predicament which was only revealed in Mary's field notes and later interview:

> She [the instructor] went back to Sheri, Miriam, Robert, Leslie, & Liza, five or six times in the same exercise, so that they would talk during *that* exercise, instead of

changing the exercise so that they would be able to fit something in. [Later when I asked Sheri why she didn't have a story, she said]:

> Well, I just don't have a horror story to tell, and I didn't have anything to say, so I didn't talk. But Charlotte made me talk, so I talked about something different, but it really wasn't relevant, so I felt worse telling about something that was irrelevant.

Fortunately, the dysphoric tension generated by the instructional setting disappeared outside of class, as Sheri and her classmates took advantage of the daily opportunities, especially during and after meals, to interact with Charlotte, who was particularly helpful and approachable. Charlotte was thus frequently surrounded by her own students who relished in the opportunity to communicate with her on an informal basis, especially at the dining hall terrace, even in the presence of other students.

In this relaxed atmosphere, she not only chatted with them about personal matters, but provided academic advice as well, always in a friendly and light-hearted manner, but with a serious attitude towards her teaching responsibilities; she even provided extra help for those experiencing difficulties, and offered a shoulder to cry on. Students were extremely appreciative of these efforts, and very definitely attributed the praise to Charlotte personally. When asked what the best thing about the Middlebury experience was, one of the 201 students answered simply: "That's easy: Charlotte." A particular quality which was singled out by one student was her way of making students feel at ease, and lightening up the class atmosphere with her sense of humor. As Tim put it:

> I think that, in general, there is a light feeling in class: there is a lot of joking, and it's good.... I think that most people are serious about the work, but in class there is room for fun. I like that.

However, if Charlotte's efforts were unanimously described as affectively euphoric, they could not compensate for the shortcomings of the "Capretz Method" and its curriculum in the cognitive domain; except for the video itself, *French in Action* was mostly perceived as non-euphoric. Charlotte's talents and personality thus worked to motivate the students *in spite of* the formal curriculum, and unfortunately not in synergy with it. Her efforts also served to counteract, inasmuch as possible, the particularly dysphoric circumstances surrounding the other 201 instructor.

While Charlotte's efforts in this regard must certainly not be underrated, and while it was clear in both observations and interviews that she was in large part successful in salvaging what could have been a truly catastrophic experience for the 201 beginners, her presence and actions could not entirely cancel out those aspects of the curriculum which were a source of dysphoric tension for many of the students.

Most of the 201 students resented on several occasions the seemingly endless repetition and lack of creative, constructive opportunities. Victor, one of the stronger male students remarked:

> We repeat a lot of things in the afternoon. For instance, we all studied the letters of the alphabet, A, B, C, D, E, F, G... then everybody said it --- Fifteen! Fifteen times the alphabet! Augh! I think that is a waste of time. We waste time!

More specifically, students "detested" the mindless drills and "lack of intellectual stimulation" in the course. One explicit characteristic of *French in Action* is to make fun of itself and present overly stereotyped characters and situations, supposedly in order to lighten up, and thus facilitate, the learning process. Although this approach may be useful in the initial learning stages, it can quickly become tedious and, as several 201 students put it, "cheesy."

When the "Capretz Method" is followed to the letter, all available time is monopolized by manipulation exercises which leave little room for naturalistic, constructivist activities that would challenge linguistic, communicative and general cognitive abilities, as well as knowledge in various domains (science, art, history, geography, etc.). Since such challenges did not usually occur within the 201 class, though, the resulting impression was that language acquisition is essentially a mindless process, as one student described it:

> Mary: Is intellectual work more demanding for you than physical activity?
> Tim: That's an interesting question, because learning a language is not exactly intellectual work, I think. It's different; it's a lot of exercises. Now, we are reading *Huis Clos*, and *that's* intellectual work. And it's interesting because it is the *first* time that I have started to think at Middlebury, to *really* think.

It is rather alarming that students should experience such a lack of intellectual motivation until the last week of the session --- alarming, but not surprising, since until then the 201 curriculum closely espoused *French in Action*, and neither encouraged nor allowed the kind of activities that these students would have found stimulating at their cognitive, not linguistic, level.

b) French 101

The 101 curriculum, on the other hand, frequently demanded that students contribute their personal experience, point of view or expertise to *shape* the oral or written activity proposed by the instructor, rather than merely perform obediently. After an initial phase of inevitable self-centeredness (family descriptions, autobiographical sketches, narratives of events from the previous week), most students ventured into far more ambitious projects in which their particular vision of reality translated into a remarkable variety of form and content. This occurred during the course of class activities, but was most prominent in *journal* entries, where creativity as well as reflection could be fully exploited.

There was a story about "M. Capretz meets Godzilla," another one about the Smurfs, "The Adventures of Descartes" and a two part presentation arguing, with some difficulty, that Plato was easy to understand. In the second half of the session, as linguistic expertise grew, there was a distinct trend towards reflection on the learning experience itself.

Jerry wrote a series of predictions about what would become of students and instructors after the session: one would-be seductor eloped with his teacher; Fran and Helen would come back to Middlebury and buy that café where they had spent so much time; Katie was so smart that she would take over as French instructor; and one of the younger students would unfortunately die of a "twinkie" overdose. Such playfulness should not be seen as gratuitous, but as evidence of "flow," when students stop being conscious of the effort and artificiality of formal instruction and can distance themselves from it, reveling instead on *what* they have to say.

In her *journal*, Katie waxed philosophical on her condition as a thinker:

> Unhappy perhaps is man, but happy is Katie who can read Baudelaire in French. (And learn a few sentences as well!) Is it possible to be an intellectual and a happy person at the same time? I think it's impossible for me. In order to be an intellectual, one must study, read and analyze. I love reading, and I also like studying interesting subjects, but I hate analysis. I believe that analysis is the

> cause for misfortune. For instance (a hypothetical situation): I am happy, I have many friends, I study in an excellent school, etc. If I analyzed this situation, I would understand that I don't deserve it. I am not perfect (I am no Mireille [the *French in Action* hero], am I?) This thought makes me unhappy. If I analyzed my life, I would realize that it has no meaning.... I would like to be a cabbage (no kidding, I am completely serious); cabbages don't analyze. They don't think. They sit like that [arrow to sketch in the margin]. They have a lot of sun. A cabbage's life is very tranquil. I'd love that!

Here again the playfulness is obvious (including a jab at the ludicrously unrealistic *French in Action* story), but deftly intermingled with truly serious concerns.

Helen chose to devote her last *journal* to an appraisal, which sounded like something of a course evaluation (though naturally all in French):

> My experience at Middlebury was truly rich and positive. In my opinion, we beginners have been very fortunate because there is a good synergy in our class. Clearly, our instructors were the indispensable factors in creating an efficient collaboration between us. Both were truly creative with their lessons, and managed to stimulate us to speak and participate in class. I can say with sincerity that they motivated me to learn French through their enthusiasm in and out of class. Naturally, the evidence of their success is the achievement of the beginners. I think it is a miracle that we can all speak French --- not perfectly, of course! But at least we can all travel to France, catch the subway to the Louvre and order a hot chocolate at Café Angelina!

From the point of view of the global communicative environment of the school, this piece also functioned as a thank-you note which clearly connoted the personal nature of the message, as opposed to the formal nature of standard college evaluations. It was also the opportunity to contribute a suggestion, which in a way helped turn that student into a partner of her instructors. She continued:

> I only have a suggestion for next year. I noted that it was difficult for beginners to meet graduate students. In my opinion, it would be a good idea to organize a get-together between beginners and graduates. The theme of the event would be "French Culture." The graduate students could speak about their experiences in France, if they had lived there. To have an interaction with other students would give beginners an excellent foundation to learn French.

Helen had independently reached the same conclusion that we had, expressed it in excellent French and followed it up with a very appropriate suggestion --- which might seem "miraculous," if we think of her as a beginner with only six weeks of French at the time, but quite normal if we remember that in "real life", she is an industry executive whose advice is sought and heeded.

C) Beginners as Mature Adults

In fact, most 101 and 201 students were high achievers whose regular life was infused with cognitive challenges of all sorts, and who found it very "oppressive" to be suddenly "infantilized" and forced to spend their time on choral repetitions, decontextualized grammatical manipulations and other such mindless activities. Because of the typical background of Middlebury students and their expectations (which we discuss below), what could be a regrettable but relatively harmless lack of euphoric tension became a major source of dysphoria in the 201 group.

Roger, an outstanding 201 student, deplored this situation as follows:

> The pledge is very annoying because, in my case at least, it is impossible to have an intellectual conversation; I simply cannot speak as fast as I think. And after three weeks without intellectual conversation, it is bad for my brain, because at home I have it [intellectual conversation] all the time with my friends. (...) And for me, there is too much homework, but it's not *good* homework; it's video and audio tapes, repeating.

What should be noted is that, earlier on, Roger had acknowledged the positive value of the pledge; two weeks later, he thought it "annoying" because he had not found an outlet for his intellectual needs --- so the pledge itself was not at issue there, only the lack of opportunity to exercise his mental capacities to their limits.

Though with even more limited linguistic abilities, 101 students were often given the chance to explore their natural interests and challenge their mental agility in the performance of activities which required reflection and creativity --- all within the scope of the curriculum. For instance, they had to muster their knowledge of history and combine it with reading comprehension while attempting to sequence image cards made for French schoolchildren which represent scenes from the history of France, or make sense of various authentic documents (commercial brochures, ads, food wrappings, maps, etc.) before using them in divergent role-play.

Because the 101 curriculum was content-based, and supported by authentic documents, the students were constantly challenged to piece together alien cultural realities as they exerted their language abilities. The inductive approach meant that much of the material was presented as a puzzle to be solved, rather than as a fact or a rule to be memorized and applied. As a result, most students focused on trying to communicate --- often with enormous difficulty; but since it often involved information which had actual significance in their lives, they seemed gratified when their classmates understood and responded to the content of the communicative efforts.

Larry, who struggled linguistically throughout the session, wrote three journal entries on Plato's philosophical system, which he also discussed in an interview with Mary. Philip, who would sometimes launch into explanations on Heidegger and Hegel at lunch, opted nevertheless to write a hilarious multi-part narrative about a Jewish-Christian wedding he had attended. Ken was quite displeased about the lack of explicit grammatical instruction in 101, and considered most in-class activities useless; yet, he found constant opportunities to discuss the importance in his life of his multifarious experiences in China, martial arts, and French pastry.

Katie often took advantage of the college's extensive video collection to watch classic French movies, which she later expertly discussed orally in interviews, or in writing as journal entries. Jerry, an investment banker, tackled the very serious French newspaper, *Le Monde* after only 9 days of class, and adroitly made use of an article on the civil war in Rwanda to write a fictitious interview with a French soldier. He even attended a lecture by Professor Agostini on "Money and the French people," and later wrote about it as well. Fran, a physics teacher, often spoke and wrote about her personal experiences and remarkable family history, but also reflected on the difficulties of changing professions, and finally choosing one in which she felt that she was contributing to society.

In the "Capretz Method," however, the typical "creative" activity is a skit, which usually involves two people enacting a "recreation of the story"; this means impersonating characters in *French in Action*, and duplicating a situation found in the storyline, so that even when students are not doing exercises and pattern drills, they are still conceptually bound to the method. As Mary's observations indicated, when five successive groups perform a skit on the same theme, the level of interest in the class, as well as of participation, dropped dramatically.

When asked to describe participation amongst her students, Patricia replied:

> Let's say that right now, with the skits I do, they speak 50% of the time, and for the remainder of the hour, they speak in the sense that they make short sentences to answer my questions. It's not really a discussion. But also, while two are doing a skit, there are thirteen who do nothing; so, they don't talk. Let's say that they speak between themselves during the skit, since I ask them to work in pairs and put the skit together.

Essentially, then, even when students had a fleeting opportunity to produce their own discourse, they still relied heavily on the oft-repeated scenes from the video and the stock characters in it. In accordance to the very traditional outlook of the "Capretz Method," most of the work done in class was conceptually segmented in "grammar" (with rule enunciation and drills), "vocabulary" and "skits"; there was little attempt to introduce any of the myriad "communicative" activities which have been routinely used in F/SLA for the past ten years.

Such a convergent style of teaching, which can effectively discourage students from participating in class, and foster a counterproductive approach to testing, emerged as a major source of dysphoric tension for the 201 students. As one young woman explained:

> Liza: I think Patricia tries to ask questions of everybody, but because she is less patient, sometimes she skips a person. I think it is difficult sometimes, because if the teacher thinks that a student can't answer, the student won't be able to answer.... it's a self-fulfilling prophecy. And I can tell she's really bored, and I don't want to cause problems, and it's better to skip me altogether.
> Mary: So you speak maybe for a total of a minute in a two-hour class? And only when you answer a question?
> Liza: Yes.
> Mary: And who speaks the most in class?
> Liza: The guys: Oliver, Roger, etc... Janet also, she's very sociable, it's a question of personality. I'm less talkative.
> Mary: But you talk a lot with me!
> Liza: (Laughs) Yes, but I am more comfortable with you.

Indeed, classroom observations confirmed that Patricia insisted on maintaining absolute control over what was being said in the classroom, and chastised students who talked among themselves during class, although they did so mostly to try and clarify material they did not understand. Mary saw students rolling their eyes, putting their heads down on their desks, and writing notes to each other complaining about the boring exercises, how useless the work was, and how they were "sick of" the lesson.

Admittedly, this particular instructor --- who was relieved of her duties by the French School director as soon as the gravity of the situation was realized --- created an unusually high amount of dysphoric tension in and out of the classroom, by the nature of her personal interactions with most of the students, choice of activities, assignments, instructional style, grading, and lack of content as well as pedagogical knowledge.

Yet, the exceptionally high level of dysphoric tension in that particular class cannot be explained away by the human factor alone: in fact, Patricia's instructional style only exacerbated the problems inherent to the *French in Action*-based curriculum, such as teacher centeredness, a mechanistic approach, an anti-intellectual bias, and the absence of built-in creative/ constructive learning opportunities.

This was illustrated *a contrario* by Charlotte, who did much to compensate for the flaws in the "Capretz Method" and created in her own class a pleasant learning atmosphere in which affective dysphoria was mostly unknown, *in spite of* the uninspiring *French in Action* materials, and although she could only neutralize the dysphoric cognitive tension generally produced by the method.

When a change did occur, in the last third of the session, and after numerous complaints were lodged, the new activities with songs, poems, cartoons and miscellaneous non-*French in Action* materials were, rightfully, perceived by the students as unchallenging, but at least pleasant and harmless. However, we seldom heard any student judging the class on a truly didactic or pedagogical level, and dysphoric tension was attributed to the tediousness and mindlessness of exercises; but the curriculum as a conceptual whole was not criticized. If Oliver "disagreed" with the method, it was simply because it did not meet his expectations of an even *more* traditional and grammar-centered approach; in fact, Ken, in 101, expressed a very similar complaint.

It is important to note that, without Patricia's class, most 201 students would probably not have voiced any discontent about the curriculum or *French in Action*, and we can assume that there have not been any significant negative reactions in the past, at least not enough to warrant changing the approach. The first reason was that the 201 curriculum was merely perceived as non-dysphoric or non-euphoric, and the second, more important reason was that students did not necessarily expect anything better, or at least anything different.

3. Expected Mastery of New Material

One aspect of the beginners' courses which inevitably shocks students is the pace; in most colleges and universities, the materials covered in the 7-week session would take up three or four semesters. Not being able to keep up was frequently reported as a cognitively dysphoric situation, especially by those students who felt they had to understand every word and do every workbook exercise --- even when that was not required, or even advised.

In the 201 course, an additional measure of difficulty was added by the absence of lag time between initial presentation of new material in the morning, and exploitation activities in the afternoon, where students were supposed to show some mastery of the content. One student commented:

> This morning, we learned the future, but in the second [afternoon] class, it was expected that everybody know the future --- all of a sudden [snaps fingers].

In 101, the introductory videos were shown in the afternoon course, and new materials were used in activities the next morning, which allowed the students more time to internalize them, and have a grasp of them adequate enough to attempt using it in communicative situations.

So far, we have mostly discussed factors which appeared to induce euphoric or dysphoric tension in most students; however, our study revealed that it is often impossible to generalize, since students reported very diverse reactions to the same given circumstances. This led us to consider, then, that *expectations* play a central part in determining how students will likely perceive an event or situation, regardless of how it could be judged by external, if not objective, standards.

E) Students' Expectations

One widespread expectation was that all the grammar would be explained in detail in the textbook and/or in class, and that there would be detailed grammar exercises. In 101, in keeping with the philosophy of curriculum integration (see the Appendix for the *Beginners' Guide*), no separate grammar instruction was scheduled, but specific points were explained and discussed as they occurred in communicative situations. This approach created serious dysphoric tension in students who came from traditional backgrounds of grammar-centered teaching, like Hank:

> I like to have the time to study verb conjugations, which are important for me to study for the class. And in class, explanations on sentence structure is very useful... [it is good] to see examples in different contexts, and I understand better like that.

In 201, the afternoon class initially appeared to meet the second part of that expectation by offering theoretical grammar instruction almost exclusively. Unfortunately, Patricia's explanations tended to be more confusing than helpful, and sometimes downright erroneous. Moreover, the *French in Action* textbook and workbook do not offer much explicit grammar material, and students often bemoaned their absence. Sheri in 201 remarked:

> I think that grammar is very important. I want to study and emphasize grammar, either in writing or speaking. Sometimes I think about the words we have in conversation in our class, but then all the words go away, although I think I've studied them. But in the class where grammar is taught, I can gain much knowledge, I can read a French book. In conversation in class, I think talking is a waste.

Sam, one of her classmates, had a similar sense of disorganization:

> It would be good if there was a list of vocabulary, because now I have to look in the whole book for a word, and it takes a long time. I would prefer to study the word, rather than look for it.

Sam obviously could not see the heuristic value of "looking for" words, and his concept of "studying the word" --- i.e. to memorize vocabulary lists --- could hardly be considered productive in light of everything we know about information processing by the brain. Albeit in very different ways, both the 101 and 201 curricula approached grammar inductively; most students found it cognitively dysphoric because they saw it as a lack of structure, rather than as a different structure. The fact that 101 students had a supplementary grammar book with thematic charts, *La Grammaire en tableaux*, did not significantly alleviate their concern. In any case, the "objective" validity of a particular studying or teaching method seemed far less important than the learners' deeply ingrained *beliefs* about what was supposed to work.

While, predictably, a significant number of students preferred using grammar charts, tables and vocabulary lists, myriad other learning styles were described by both 101 and 201 students: use of visual aids, a purely global and non-analytical approach, context-rich instruction, cooperative work and conversely --- study in isolation, a regular and strict daily schedule, repetition and rote memorization, extensive lab work, reading, flipping flashcards, or kinesthetic and TPR-style activities. This non-exhaustive list shows that no single approach could have satisfied everyone, but that some flexibility was needed in the course so as to accommodate many of the students' individual learning styles and preferences, and to neutralize some of the dysphoria generated by unmet expectations.

The desire for systematic, deductive teaching of grammar was manifest in several 101 students who had experience in learning oriental languages, especially Chinese and Japanese, where traditionally instruction is very highly structured and proceeds from the simplest elements --- letters and sounds --- to words and sentences in a way that emphasizes patterns. As Andrea put it:

> In my imagination, first we learn the alphabet, and then we learn words and then, conversation. (Laughs) Very different.

Then Larry explained his version of it:

> For Japanese, I demonstrate ... [makes diagrams on paper] You learn how to mark the subject. Sentence pattern is very regular. For other patterns, it's like this .... [makes diagrams] So for me, to learn a language, I think of a pattern, so a diagram is very useful for me; I would like to diagram the grammar. Guy gave me the name of a book [which includes grammatical diagrams], and I'll buy it tomorrow.

Ken, an American who had learnt Chinese, was particularly adamant about his ideas on what language learning should be like:

> Ken: I am very meticulous, very stubborn. For me, this method doesn't work, so I refuse the "Capretz Method."
> Mary: So the method doesn't work, and you refuse to use it?
> Ken: Yes, yes.
> Mary: And how does this attitude manifest itself?
> Ken: I don't take part in the weekly tests, I don't do the homework...
> Mary: But the homework doesn't have anything to do with the "method;" it isn't the same thing, is it?
> Ken: No, it isn't always the same thing.... But I prefer [studying] all the ...
> Mary: Details? Little things?
> Ken: Yes. I use my own method, but it doesn't work here, it's impossible, because of the speed. It goes too fast for my method.

Ken's own self-described "meticulous" approach stood against the "Capretz Method" as well as, more importantly, against all the fundamental points of the 101 philosophy. As a result, he experienced extreme dysphoria but nevertheless persisted in wanting to do things his way --- to the point of, paradoxically, following the *French in Action* curriculum scrupulously on his own:

> Mary: When *French in Action* is used in Gaby's class, do you watch it and participate?
> Ken; Yes, I participate.
> Mary: And in the evening, do you study?
> Ken: Yes, I read both lessons every day,.... I go to the lab to listen to the cassettes, it's nearly three hours of tapes, and that's not being meticulous, that's only repeating once. After that, I look at the lesson, and I make a vocabulary list; that's necessary, of course. And after you listen to the cassette, it takes a lot of time to do all the

> activities, and then you have to write.
> Mary: But you're not obligated to do all the workbook exercises.
> Ken: Yes, but for me that's a problem... first you have to understand a lesson. After you understand it, then you start the next lesson; for me it has to be very regular.

We discovered, from one of the graduate interns, that Ken, from the very beginning, had absolutely refused to give the 101 approach a try, attempting instead to maintain his original intent, even when that proved rather disastrous. The intern spoke about his peculiar learning style:

> Then there is Ken. The method is difficult for him, because he is used to learning by very grammar-centered methods... He wants to know what each and every word means, he wants to learn the grammar first. He was making charts with *je*, *tu* and *il* [subject pronouns], and he hadn't yet done that in class. Then he came to see me this week with his *journal* [sigh]; he tries to speak and write in English, and he did not look in the [French monolingual] dictionary --- he had many accent and spelling mistakes. I did not get angry, but I told him that wasn't very serious work.

Philip, another 101 student with an extensive grammar-learning background, was initially dismayed by the lack of systematic rule-stating and exercises in class:

> I'm more analytical. My first tendency in studying a language is to study the grammar. I make charts of the constructions... and this method is certainly *one* way of getting results; good results, and some bad ones. Deborah [his fiancée and classmate] learns the spirit of a language more quickly than I do. You can't get the spirit of the language through grammar; so both methods are very different, but most of the time, they are very complementary.

Contrary to Ken, Philip could see some value in the 101 philosophy, but remained convinced that his own learning style demanded a far more structured approach, which he pursued semi-independently. He studied grammar outside of class, but kept asking specific questions to his instructors on a daily basis, in the classroom, the dining hall or anywhere else he could find them. He thus exploited the inherent flexibility of the course format to accommodate his particular needs --- and, ironically, wrote in his final evaluation a praise of the quality of grammar instruction he had received. Speaking on that same topic, Deborah remarked:

> With the intuitive method, when you learn grammar in context, you never forget it, and that's very good; yes, I like this fact.... But when you learn the grammar in context, the tests are very difficult, [and] it is an enormous blow to your confidence.
> Mary: Do you feel that the tests are more difficult than what you learn in class? That they don't correspond?
> Deborah: No, they do correspond, but... we must believe in our intuition... and when the test is very difficult....
> Mary: You don't trust your intuition?
> Deborah: No. The grammar tests are more difficult, and I know I did not study enough.

In fact, Deborah felt at a disadvantage in comparison to some of her classmates who were "skeptics," i.e. studied a lot of grammar on the side, and seemed to get better test results that those who, like her, tried to "believe in the method," and learn in a global, non-analytical, "intuitive" way.

This feeling of unfairness had strongly dysphoric effects on Deborah, who felt that she had "fallen behind" the very first week --- a fact she firmly believed, although there was no external evidence to support it. What seemed remarkable was that poor performance on the tests became so dysphoric, in light of Deborah's clear overall success in the course, and despite the fact that the tests represented only a small portion of the grade.

If we try and make sense of her apparently disproportionate dysphoric reaction to the test, we can appreciate how culturally-determined expectations can shape the experience of students. Most people familiar with U.S. education know two types of learning environments: one "traditional," i.e. strictly academic, with a stern classroom atmosphere and difficult tests that many students will fail, the other "humanistic" or "progressive," i.e. very relaxed and liberal, where tests are student-friendly and the philosophy focused on making everyone succeed. Whenever they are confronted with a new environment, students parse it into one or the other category; but the Middlebury Language Schools are very confusing in this respect.

The Middlebury atmosphere is extremely friendly and casual, with a high degree of familiarity between professors and students, especially in beginners' courses, where first names are used for everyone, as well as the informal "*tu*" second person address. From all indicators, then, students definitely parse the course in the "humanistic" category, and in so doing come to expect only easy-going assessment practices.

Although the *journal* and the interview allowed a great deal of flexibility, however, the written *contrôle* [weekly test] and the listening comprehension test did not. In part because of this misinterpretation, some 101 students initially received much lower grades than expected, resulting in dysphoric reactions accompanied by a sense of unfairness. In fact, the tests did correspond to what had been done in the preceding week, but required a much more precise command of the language. Many students mistook the relaxed instructional style, reinforced by the generally casual atmosphere in the French School, for a sign of complacency. In a relatively short amount of time, however, the students reported getting used to the instructional style and grading practices, and adapted accordingly.

Indeed the beginning students were mostly quite successful at adapting to the Middlebury environment, but they acknowledged that, as they made the necessary adjustments in their work schedules, housing, sleeping and eating habits, social activity, and other details of daily life, they underwent considerable changes in the ways they thought and behaved --- to the point that they recognized in themselves different personalities than the ones they had in "real" life.

F) Personality Changes During the Middlebury Experience

> Adults typically perceive themselves as reasonably intelligent, socially-adept individuals, sensitive to different socio-cultural mores. These assumptions are rarely challenged when communicating in a native language... However, the situation when learning a foreign language stands in marked contrast... Because complex and non-spontaneous operations are required to communicate at all, any performance in the L2 is likely to challenge an individual's self-concept as a competent communicator... Adult language learners' self perceptions of genuineness in presenting themselves to others may be threatened by the limited range of meaning and affect that can be deliberately communicated (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1991, p. 31).

Beginning students in the French School often spoke of their inability to project their "real" selves, and our research has revealed a number of students actually reporting the emergence of a separate personality in the target language. For some, this separate personality that manifested itself in physical demeanor (different ways and volume of laughing, speed and tone of oral communication, mannerisms, etc.) was distinctly dysphoric. This observation partly illustrates the finding that people live a sort of parallel life at Middlebury, one in which they are trying to be full participants in the "foreign" culture, rather than students merely taking a college course.

The emergence of the separate personalities, or, as two students independently put it, different "masks" they wear in changing environments, were interpreted in distinct ways by the students experiencing them. What was particularly surprising for the students was that they were different from the way they both thought and behaved in their "real" lives. Sometimes they were more talkative, sometimes less sociable --- but the real point is that they had significantly *changed.*

This metamorphosis has crucial implications on curriculum and instruction: as much as authentic language learning cannot consist of translating the L1 into the L2, but means experiencing the L2 from within, the learner cannot expect to transpose his L1 personality unchanged into the L2. As philosophers have often pointed out, language is not merely a tool for us to communicate or express ourselves; it is a medium of our construction of reality, so that to enter a different language is very much like entering a new reality. The powerful impact of this experience on the learner should never be underestimated.

We found that personality change invariably created tension, but that, as the examples below will illustrate, it could be either euphoric or dysphoric, depending on the individual and on the circumstances involved.

Our research findings indicated that infantilization, and the general attitude of most upper-level students and professors that beginners are altogether inarticulate, was strongly dysphoric. Beginners needed to be given the chance to make their new personality as rich and meaningful as their original one, even if different from it. In 201, this was made even more difficult by the mechanistic "Capretz method," the requirement to complete all exercises, no matter how mindless, and perhaps above all, the dearth of opportunities to demonstrate their cognitive and creative capabilities, which stifled the development of their L2 self.

During interviews, a young female student in 201, who would sometimes not speak a word for an entire class period, and generally seemed extremely shy and retiring, turned out to be a vivacious, eloquent conversationalist. She not only had much to say, but offered remarkably perceptive observations of her own on the French School setting --- and she was quite lucid about her daily disappearing act in class:

> Leslie: I think it's difficult to be myself in class; and I hate myself for it. I feel like I am completely out of control, and I hate that. I have this image of myself... [makes exaggerated, theatrical gestures]
> Mary: Enthusiastic?
> Leslie: Yes, but... sometimes I think that it's simply that I want to be pretentious.
> Mary: You *want* to be pretentious?!
> Leslie: Yes, or something like that... I like to be right, but I'd also like to be more subtle, because I think it always comes out like this [makes theatrical gestures]... What I mostly miss here is being able to express myself.

In fact, the interviews with Mary proved that, given the right opportunity, Leslie *was* able to express herself at a level she considered fulfilling, even though it was not the one she was accustomed to in her native language. If we look objectively at the quality of her French, we can immediately tell that it is well below that of her English --- and she was aware of it --- yet, she found that level good enough to express herself at length, although in class and in other social settings at Middlebury, she found it horrible enough to prevent her from speaking altogether.

Leslie, being quite conscious of this problem, spontaneously told Mary one day just how much she appreciated the chance to communicate with someone not as a "student," but as an equal, and even as a friend:

> I like speaking with you, because it is an opportunity for me to feel at home.... I have the idea with you that I am myself, but during the day, no, (Laughs) because there isn't time.

Naturally, such familiarity is in part attributable to Mary's status: at Middlebury, she was not a professor (although she is one otherwise). In spite of the very casual style of 101 and 201 instructors and their relatively young age, the barrier between teacher and students cannot be so easily removed; but we found that much had been done to treat beginners in 101 --- no matter how inarticulate --- as intelligent adults, and not by simply being nice or friendly to them.

In one interesting case, one of the interns provided the kind of peer-to-peer communicative opportunity which helped Sheri, a struggling false beginner, feel more comfortable and satisfied, despite her sense that she was the "bottom of the class" in French. They were classmates in the same graduate program, and the intern told us that they often chatted about their common experiences and acquaintances, which gave Sheri a comforting sense of belongingness --- she could see herself as the high-achieving doctoral student that she was, rather than as a hapless *débutante* prone to nervous giggling whenever she had to speak up. She explained to Mary:

> I can speak to you like this, because there's only two of us. If I'm asked to speak in class, I say no, that's all.

Robert, another 201 student, told Mary he was "a little timid," a pronouncement which surprised her because he had not appeared shy at all during the previous interview:

> Mary: You? Timid?
> Robert: Yes. (Laugh) Here, it's different now. Because, the first time [first interview], I told you many things that I don't share with too many people; so I believe that our relationship is a little different.

Obviously, Robert felt that some sort of a bond was necessary before he felt completely comfortable communicating with someone on a truly meaningful level; Philip, a 101 student, made the very same observation. The problem then, it seems, was for the students to be able to initiate such relationships early on in the session, without having to break the pledge, as we mentioned above, in order to "prove themselves" either socially or intellectually.

Previous research had indicated that even self-described talkative, outgoing, socially-active and even popular individuals can suffer from freezing shyness, error anxiety, and stage fright in their L2 personalities; our own observations, although somewhat surprising in the Middlebury population, confirmed that communicative apprehension is indeed common, even in people who apparently have no predisposition to it in their native language, and who are very strongly motivated to learn another language.

What seems more remarkable in the findings of our study, however, is that the effect of a dual personality can also have quite euphoric ramifications. Katie, a young 101 student who is not a native English speaker, described herself in her home and university surroundings:

> I'm not exactly timid at home, but I don't talk very much; I'm rather the serious type.... But last summer at [university name], for example, I was very, very timid. I only wore black. I didn't speak to anyone, didn't make eye contact. Not at all. Here, though, I find myself to be very sociable. I'm not timid; in fact I start conversations with people I don't know... My friend Deborah tells me I'm the type of person that starts the party... For me this is a total surprise; it's completely different! It's not me. OK, it's me also, but it's the opposite of the other me; it's me here and it's me there, but it's not the *real* me.

Katie's surprise at her own personality change was consistent with her astute observations about the human condition in general; her spontaneous remarks at explaining this phenomenon four weeks into the session were quite eloquent, despite her faulty French, and she was able to express the complexity of the situation using relatively simple linguistic patterns and vocabulary:

> Katie: We all have many, many masks. For example, here, I am very different from how I am at my university. It's true, but it's involuntary, but I have a mask here, and I have another at [university name]. I have a third mask at home, and I have a fourth mask with my friends, and I have a fifth mask with my boyfriend, etc. If you take away one mask, then another, then another, there's nothing left. Nothing exists....
> Mary: Is it possible to see the *real* person?
> Katie: No, I don't think so.
> Mary: So what mask are you wearing now?
> Katie: It's not on purpose; it's not something I do that's false or artificial; that's not the same thing because this is involuntary...
> Mary: But the *real* you?
> Katie: The real me doesn't exist... except maybe when I sleep... But the Middlebury atmosphere and these circumstances determine individuality, personality.

The mask that Katie wore in her French personality allowed her the freedom to do things she normally would not do either at home or at school; she actively participated in Middlebury's pericurricular activities: theater, Cabaret, study-break parties, and attended films and concerts, and often went out with other students in her class.

By far the most striking insight into the personality-altering nature of the Middlebury experience was provided by Leslie, a 201 student who saw it as a reenactment of Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain.*

> Leslie: It [*Magic Mountain*] seems exactly like Middlebury to me. It's odd, there are lots of connections, because it takes place in a sanatorium, and there are many people of different nationalities, and everyone speaks a foreign language, and in the book, the French is in French. It's interesting because the first character in the story lives there for seven years, and here it is seven weeks (laughs). There's a chapter that I think about a lot here; its title is "*Walpurgisnacht.*" It's a type of carnival, and everybody wears masks, and for me at Middlebury, the mask is the language. It's so odd, because the first character, Hans Castorp speaks for the first time with a beautiful woman whose name is "Chauchat" (Laughs) "Hot cat." (Laughs) I love it. And, wearing his mask, he *tutoies* her [uses the informal,

> second person singular "*tu*" form]: "I love speaking French, because it's like speaking without speaking. It's like speaking in a dream." And I often think of that here, because I think everyone is wearing the mask of language, because everyone is at a different level, and it is difficult to speak, and everyone needs to express themselves, but it's not possible with language.
> Mary: They have to rely on other things?
> Leslie: Yes, yes, yes. People are more exaggerated because of that: they laugh really loud, and it's strange, because if it were in English, it wouldn't be the same type of laugh... There is another connection for me, because when Hans Castorp is on the mountain, it is a place where he is free to be something that he cannot be in his hometown. I think it's the idea that life is left behind, and here it's the same thing. And here, most people don't come from Middlebury, so everyone is in a place where it's possible to be other things.... The idea of Hans Castorp on the Magic Mountain is to let yourself go for awhile, to be free, because there is not the chance to do that in the real world.

The importance of students' self-concept both in the L1 and L2 as well as their work ethic, interactions with friends, family, schoolmates, and professors seemed to play an important role in their ability to deal with the whole Middlebury experience in general and with the beginning French classes in particular. We therefore look at students' coping strategies --- those they developed before arriving at Middlebury, and those that evolved with their growing understanding of the environment and of the new language.

G) Students' Coping Strategies

When faced with dysphoric tension, students deploy a wide array of coping strategies, which may work effectively not only to protect themselves, but also to delude their instructors as to their actual cognitive or affective state. Instructors thus cannot assume that all is well simply because nothing seems particularly wrong, nor can they expect that students will complain to them or to the school administration if something *is* wrong. We found that, even in case of extreme dysphoria directly related to curriculum and instruction, the strategy of many students was to distance themselves from the problem and try to ignore it, rather than actively confront it.

Indeed, Alice, a young 101 student who was seemingly doing just fine in the class, quit Middlebury and went back to her university apartment, without a single explanation to anyone. Her roommate indicated that she had been overwhelmed with the work she was trying to accomplish (writing her dissertation) at the same time as learning French, and that she just could not handle it all. Her departure came as a surprise to everyone, as she was progressing normally in class, and seemed well adjusted affectively and cognitively --- but we discovered that she did not socialize or take part in any pericurricular activities.

On the other hand, the severe dysphoric tensions which the 201 students underwent left them having to rely upon strategies that were not always the most useful in terms of their learning, but that were necessary for their own peace of mind --- and effective to the extent that none of them quit the program, although the dysphoria they experienced was strong enough for some of them to separate themselves mentally from the course, and to skip some classes, which is normally only done in case of physical illness.

For example, two of the female 201 students broke down in tears. Two other young women, both admittedly shy anyway, chose instead to simply withdraw further into themselves, and to try not to think about the long afternoon hours that often ran overtime, the seemingly endless drills, and the mindless laboratory exercises. One young man described his way of "escaping" what he believed to be the inevitable unpleasantness of Patricia's class --- although he did not necessarily express outright dissatisfaction with it:

> Tim: From time to time it is necessary for me to "disengage" for a short time, but the majority of time I am listening... [It lasts] about a minute. Since I co-monitor my emotions, I know when it's necessary for me to "disengage" myself for a short while to recuperate... two or three times per class.
> Mary: Two or three times; that's very interesting. And you recover sufficiently to be able to continue?
> Tim: Oh, yes, that's true... After new ideas are presented, and I work, work, work, after awhile, I get frustrated. And aha! It's the time for me to disengage and relax... It's very, very good for me.

As a matter of fact, most students found ways of completing the work Patricia required, in spite of the "hellish" conditions under which they had to do it. Having Charlotte's sympathetic ear alone made them feel better, and her efforts at circumventing the problems alleviated some of the frustration and fatigue; yet their resilience seemed extraordinary.

One student who did officially complain to the dean about Patricia (albeit for problems which were not of a pedagogical nature) felt that even her efforts at having the situation corrected were painful and disruptive, although she managed to overcome both the problem and the difficulty of solving it. In one interview that she had requested of Mary, she was anxious to tell her of how well she was doing:

> Liza: There's still some tension, and I do not find myself comfortable speaking with her [the person with whom she had problems] because we had this conflict, and it's difficult...
> Mary: But you'll be ok?
> Liza: Oh yes, yes. I will survive. No problem, and yes, now I think the situation is almost normal. And I would like to speak with you to tell you about my progress! I think that everyday I make a little more progress (laugh), but it's a little slow.

However, other coping strategies in the 201 class consisted of educationally less fruitful endeavors, though they were, reportedly, equally as comforting: two students told Mary of the absolute need to call friends and to speak in English. This involved friends both from their "real" lives "back home" or at their university, and within the French School, though the English was usually spoken off campus at the lake or at the falls where several students went swimming to cool off and wind down.

A few students from 201 also occasionally engaged in sports --- mostly soccer and a little tennis, walking, jogging, or going to the gym. However, only two of these students exercised often, despite the ramifications of missing out on lab time and thus risk being caught without having completed the required workbook pages. Escaping the Battell dormitory and Proctor cafeteria sometimes was enough to relax them for a few hours, though luxuries like Study-Break parties, films, and theater productions were more often foregone than attended.

Nevertheless, leaving campus was a common and easy way to step out of the "Middlebury experience," even if the students strayed only as far as Woody's or Mr. Up's, two local taverns --- where they could drink, speak in English, and make friends in a known environment with familiar noises, music, and behaviors. Yet while some students chose to surround themselves with people in a crowded bar when they went off campus, others sought the peace and quiet of nature in the rural countryside, and more important, they sought to be alone. Leslie explained it:

> Leslie: On the weekend, I think that's the time it's possible to be alone, and do things that I like to do... The weekends here are very important for me because it's really the *only* time the student has for him[her]self to pull him[her]self together... Also on Fridays, I'm always completely exhausted at the end of the day, and I'm worried that if I stay up late, then it'll be hard to get up to do all the homework that is necessary. So on Sunday, I have the chance to stay in my room, and maybe call or write my friends or read... but it seems like a lot of work to be in the world... It's always necessary to *do* something all the time.

The impression of always being busy was by no means not imagined at Middlebury, as is evidenced by all the interview and observation data, especially as the students saw their time as being filled with course requirements and not activities of their own choosing. Nevertheless, even students in 101 had the need to get away, and to have quiet "downtime."

An especially unusual coping strategy came in the form of Philip and Deborah's "Anti-Stress Finger Monsters," small, wiggly, rubber finger puppets that could be bought in any five-and-dime store for a few cents. Philip and Deborah have used them for many years, giving them to friends, playing with them by making the monsters growl as they took the brunt of the stress, and creating humor in the ridiculous grotesqueness of the little blue, pink, or purple tentacled creatures.

What we learned from the observation or testimony of these extremely diverse coping strategies is that students seemed to want to avoid confrontation with destructive problems at all costs, and that those who had had experience with productive approaches for preventing dysphoria of catastrophic proportions in fields other than language learning were able to deal with most predictable situations such as overwork, fatigue, and confusion. When more aggressive demands were made on the students, and they had to struggle further with combatting the effects of a lack of intellectual stimulation, virtually all of them succeeded, but at considerable cost to their mental, and sometimes physical, well-being.

Although the students' coping strategies mostly served them well, one of the advantages of the Middlebury experience, as we stated in our introduction, is that is supposed to *free* the students of virtually all other worries than learning the language they have come to study. When the pressure supposedly generated to help them learn absorbed and diverted their energy, the system did not function to its fullest capacity.

This research project cannot predict alternative outcomes for students who underwent such dysphoric circumstances that they were counting the days to the end of the session --- "I'm ok, now; there's only one week left," one student happily stated in an interview. Another explained he didn't care about anything his last week; he had worked hard enough, and now he was happy at being able to attend a concert, a film, the final banquet, and the Cabaret, and not be "like the graduate students who are stressed at the end" with not enough time to do everything.

The purpose of this research was to reveal how the multiple sources of tension which the beginning students reported or which we witnessed first-hand had interacted to contribute to each individual's Middlebury reality. In trying to understand these realities and to make sense of them, we discovered an number of important characteristics of the Middlebury experience: the invisible social barriers beginners must overcome in order to develop an L2 "personality"; the illusions of equal access to the pericurriculum; the importance of student expectations of the learning experience in their perception of events and circumstances as euphoric or dysphoric, and their surprising ability to cope with strong dysphoria; the need for intellectual challenge at any level of language proficiency. In the final section, we will summarize our findings and outline the emergent theories that these data have suggested.

VI. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND EMERGENT THEORIES

A) The Concept of Tension

The necessity to avoid, very early in our project, the predominant but flawed research focus on "anxiety," led us instead to develop an operational concept of "tension," which is considered qualitatively as an unstable phenomenon resulting from the conjunction of multiple factors that may not be inherently positive or negative. Findings from this research confirmed that we should place less emphasis on personal "predisposition" or on specific events or situations in terms of how they cause anxiety, and focus rather on students' interpretations of given circumstances. It is the interpretation, then, which determines the occurrence of euphoric or dysphoric tension, not the situation itself.

In further trying to understand tension, we recognized that the unique Middlebury setting made it possible for us to see that many sources of tension which are external to the classroom have a significant role to play in the quality of the learning experience --- a role which has, for the most part, been unreported, since research is usually limited to formal "instructional" curricula, and since most of the settings involved in language research simply do not have what we call a "pericurriculum."

The tension we discuss in this report appeared as a very individual phenomenon which occurs uniquely in the reality of each student and is most closely linked to personal expectations and *a priori* beliefs, especially about learning; as a result, its causes and effects defy systematization, especially when it comes to achievement. Yet, we discovered here that students reacted best when they thought that the tension, dysphoric *or* euphoric, which they experienced, could be productive, and that its apparent causes were motivated by a pedagogical and didactical strategy they recognized, whether or not they agreed with it.

We also found it indispensable to separate cognitive and affective tension, with important conceptual implications. Concerns about lowering the "affective filter" have sometimes obscured the need to attend to the cognitive quality of the work required, and as a result, there has been a tendency to adopt a humanistic, student-friendly teaching style, but with no modification at the more fundamental level of curriculum. Our data indicated that, although the affective and cognitive domains are mutually influenced, a surfeit in one does not compensate for a deficit in the other, contrary to what is often assumed, because they are not comparable quantities.

All these findings contradict the traditional model of the "learning curve," with tension as an entity which can only vary in degree; that is, not enough of it will leave the students unmotivated, and too much of it will make them crack under pressure. According to such a model, there is one point, at the apex of the bell curve, where tension is optimally applied and learning can be maximized. This model, however, does not separate between euphoric and dysphoric tension, or between cognition and affect, and should therefore be rejected.

Our research found that what most stimulated the students was not simply the *degree* of difficulty, tension, and expectation in the course, but the *quality* of materials and activities which truly challenged their cognitive abilities as intelligent adults, especially when creativity and individualized approaches were encouraged; Krashen's "i+1" formula should be interpreted in those terms. In fact, the usual dichotomy between difficult and easy seemed less relevant than the nature of the difficulty: self-referential activities, such as decontextualized grammar lessons and exercises, tended to be particularly dysphoric in proportion to their difficulty, contrary to content-based work with a student-centered basis and naturalistic development.

On the other hand, we found that simplistic materials and activities --- meant to be more accessible to beginners --- mostly produced dysphoric tension by increasing an already painful feeling of infantilization caused by the student's inability to communicate at their normal level of sophistication.

Such a reaction was particularly pronounced at Middlebury, where people do not come in order to learn conjugations and memorize vocabulary at a more intensive pace than they would anywhere else, or to simply follow a prepackaged method in seven weeks rather than four semesters. Their expectation is that the Middlebury experience will somehow be qualitatively --- and not just quantitatively --- different from what they could have known somewhere else. These expectations were in part based upon the Middlebury mystique, some heretofore unexplained phenomenon which caused people to learn a foreign language in a remarkably short amount of time. Students knew that a great deal of work would be involved, but they felt assured of success.

As a result, those who come to Middlebury expect to work assiduously, and to even encounter much difficulty, but they also expect to be confronted with a level of cognitive challenge that matches their L1 level of work as well as their own intellectual needs and abilities. When they have already been conditioned to believe that all language learning is mechanical and devoid of intellectual value, and that elementary instruction means conceptual simplicity, they will resign themselves to the lack of stimulation, but resent it all the same.

B) The Pericurriculum

For some teachers, the pericurriculum is expected to be the primary locus of real communication and enrichment, which complements the more traditional, academic work done within the formal language classroom itself. In fact, to evoke once again Krashen's famous dichotomy, it is as if the formal instructional curriculum were the vehicle for "learning," whereas the pericurriculum is to be devoted to "acquisition."

Such a system, then, would give the illusion of accomplishing what most conventional classrooms cannot: provide the opportunity both to pursue academic work and to engage in naturalistic practice. It would also seem to be able to balance whatever dysphoric tension originates from the instructional curriculum (difficulty and amount of work) as well as from living conditions and other factors, by providing enough sources of euphoric tension, so that in the end euphoria prevails for most students.

In fact, we found that this system presents several problems which may have very significant implications on the quality of the beginners' experience. For instance, the French School environment and the pericurriculum are supposed to provide sources of euphoric tension in order to supplement --- or replace --- the intellectual stimulation offered in each class. *This, however, presupposes that all students have access to these opportunities.* We did not find this to be true.

We discovered that making such opportunities available does not mean that all students have an equal chance to take advantage of them. Even when personality variables are discounted (such as sociability, congeniality or aptitude), access to pericurricular benefits is, to a very large degree, dependent on the students' social status in the school community. Beginners, even if they do enjoy a measure of sympathy from their more advanced cohorts, often find themselves confined to a "social ghetto" whose walls are erected in the first half of the session and are nearly impossible to dismantle thereafter.

This means that the school should treat the pericurriculum with the same pedagogical attention as the instructional curriculum, particularly as regards lower-level students, whose ability to socialize may be severely curtailed by linguistic limitations. We may go as far as proposing that social life during the seven-week session be considered as an integral part of the curriculum, because of the closed-in nature of the Language Schools, and because one salient aspect of the Middlebury experience is the possibility to use immediately what is learned in class to communicate in a naturalistic setting --- i.e. to simultaneously experience language as an object of study and as a means of expression.

Yet, what we saw and heard suggested that, in some cases, there may be considerable disjunction between the instructional curriculum and the pericurriculum, which makes it even more difficult for students to benefit from both. There seems to be an implicit belief that the instructional curriculum may coexist with the pericurriculum, *without* necessarily having to be integrated with it in any way; that is, formal curricular activities are not supposed to support or complement pericurricular ones.

Although this separation may have little or no impact on the life of an advanced or graduate student at Middlebury, it is full of consequences for the beginners, whose every communicative experience outside of class may become a disproportionately determinant social gamble. Most of our respondents spoke of their emerging, new, "French" personality which could prove both euphoric or dysphoric, and which developed as they interacted with others, i.e. when using French for personally meaningful communication.

When the instructional curriculum bore little relationship to the pericurriculum, as was the case in 201, beginners did not get much chance to rehearse their new role in the safety of the classroom, and generally faced social encounters with increased difficulty, despite friendly dispositions and a genuine desire to develop relationships. Dysphoria usually resulted when the new personality was almost inevitably less eloquent and sophisticated than the old; in a few cases, though, students exhibited euphoric tension at the discovery of another mask or layer of themselves they could experience.

C) Tension and Achievement: Bottom Line vs. Quality

The relationship between tension and the sense of achievement can be illustrated by the predictable affective curve which seven-week sessions are known to follow: students are in a state of shock in the first week, with growing euphoric tension in the following weeks, interrupted by a sudden depression in the fifth. Euphoria typically resumes shortly thereafter, and climaxes in the last week, when we noted a very general tendency of the students to "take stock" at the end of the summer and consider their achievements to pronounce their experience very fruitful and successful.

In light of the bottom line --- how much they had learned ---, students seemed to dismiss many of the dysphoric episodes that had bothered them so much while they were occurring, because they seemed negligible in retrospect. A striking example was the reaction to Patricia's dismissal; even though the 201 students had almost unanimously complained in very harsh terms, calling her class "hellish," "catastrophic," and "a waste of time," they were somewhat dismayed to see her go, and unsure about the reasons of her departure.

This "amnesty effect" was first of all justified by the sheer realization of how much they have accomplished: in proportion, beginners have the most spectacular learning curve of all students, and are invariably amazed by how much French they can acquire in such a short amount of time. The resulting euphoria was boosted by its practical implications in terms of social and pericurricular life: that is, beginners finally had the linguistic ability to fit in, to hold long conversations, to understand films and televised French news, to partake of all activities without feeling like they were imposing on others, and to participate in the Middlebury community without being treated in an infantile manner and without feeling too inarticulate.

Although it is tempting to espouse this "bottom-line" approach, and to dismiss dysphoric elements which are eventually forgotten, and euphoric ones which do not seem to add much to the total, perhaps we should rather consider what the students' experience *might have been* at Middlebury without the undue dysphoric tension, and the potential impact on their future learning of increased euphoric tension.

Here again, we do not wish to imply that students' achievement can be reduced to a grade, or even to linguistic proficiency. More important is their sense of the language and the culture they have studied, as well as their heuristic expertise --- which will determine how they will keep learning --- and indeed their desire to keep learning at all.

In fact, as for grades, our study revealed remarkable discrepancies between the quantitative and the qualitative results of the summer session: some of the people who had achieved the highest scores on paper were ones who looked back on their experience as successful only in the strictest sense of the word, and displayed the attitude of grateful survivors of an ordeal they would not wish upon the faint-hearted.

Other students were convinced that "the method" (however they chose to interpret that term) was worthless; a few students felt they had been ignored, left behind, and could never catch up. Conversely, some said that this had been one of the most exhilarating experience in their lives, that it had increased their desire to learn more French and discover the countries where it is spoken.

Seemingly, then, the somewhat trite but inescapable conclusion that one program cannot please everyone should not deter us from considering that much can be done to ensure that the students' experience is qualitatively better at Middlebury, no matter how good it may seem in comparison to what other programs offer. In the next section, we expound upon such remarks, and intend to further the interest in the nature of euphoric as well as dysphoric tension in the language learning process at Middlebury Language Schools.

D) Dialogue

One of the most powerful and fundamental themes that emerged from our data was the beginners' desperate desire to be listened to and talked to, not only as intelligent adults, but as human beings. However, the "factory model" of education, which is so deeply ingrained in our culture, tends to make us consider students as learning machines, which can be regulated and fine-tuned with the "right method," and to give us the illusion that, in the course of instruction, the human dimension can safely be separated from the academic --- this, however, cannot successfully be done.

In contrast, a truly humanistic and constructivist model of education treats students as vital components of instructional design, without whom teaching, curriculum, and activities could not exist. The *process* of dialogue and negotiation between teacher and students, not the *product*, is what defines learning, and it is thus the responsibility and indeed the obligation of the learner to actively participate in the construction of the entire learning experience. This co-participation in the educational process is what inextricably fuses the human dimension with the academic dimension.

When a humanistic teaching *style* is merely superimposed on a mechanistic *curriculum*, as if the former could compensate for the latter, the rapport between teacher and students, pleasant as it may be, does not equate with true cooperation in the learning enterprise. As a result, the affective euphoria which is often induced by casual, even friendly interaction between instructors and students at Middlebury does not affect the pedagogical relationship at a fundamental level and in any case, as we have noted before, cannot compensate for cognitive dysphoria or non-euphoria.

In fact, part of the issue of dialogue rests on a reciprocal relationship between the parties involved, which is rarely seen in formal education. At the institutional level, there are few channels of communication which are conducive to the kind of give-and-take dialogue implies. At Middlebury, as in many colleges and universities, the students' voice is mostly heard in evaluations and, in extreme cases, in direct complaints to either the teacher or to the administration.

M. Jourlait told us that, when his directorial duties kept him out of the classroom altogether, he missed being in contact with students, and that it was sometimes difficult for an administrator to know exactly was the students' state of mind. He spoke of meetings with students who had specifically requested to see him in his office:

> No one ever comes to see me just to tell me that everything is wonderful. People only come when they have a complaint, and I think, "What is it going to be this time?"

Such imbalance towards the negative tends to put teachers and administrators on the defensive. but it also places some students in a delicate position. We have remarked that there seems to be an implicit belief at the Language Schools that students all have strong, extroverted personalities, so that they will not hesitate to speak up in class --- and presumably to voice whatever opinion, positive or negative, they may have on curriculum, teaching, and the school in general. In fact, we observed that students could be infinitely less outspoken than what could be expected, especially when their incipient communicative ability created a major obstacle to making a precise point.

Here again, we did see several cases of students who did not hesitate to express their opinion, articulate a complaint or make suggestions --- and who were listened to with all the attention they deserved. This, however, did not necessarily occur *because* they were presented with a structure intended to facilitate dialogue, other than the sheer availability of their instructors, and the prevailing casual atmosphere.

This issue, as several others, is ultimately linked to the nature of the curriculum: in a teacher-centered system, there is no built-in structure for co-participation, so that virtually the only form of student input which can be taken into account is complaining. When nearly all of the 201 students had complained to Charlotte about Patricia's class, measures were indeed taken to remedy the problem --- or rather, to alleviate its symptoms --- but the curriculum as a whole was not put in question, although our interviews reveal a response to it which was unanimously not positive or euphoric, even though it was not always necessarily negative or dysphoric.

When a dialogue structure, such as the interviews, was established, these concerns emerged very clearly; however, the fact that they were concerns, rather than positive contributions, is incidental. When channels of teacher-student communication are explicitly instituted, a real dialogue can occur, wherein students will start contributing to the course in the form of suggestions, or even comments which do not prompt immediate action, but can feed the teacher's reflection on his/her pedagogical enterprise.

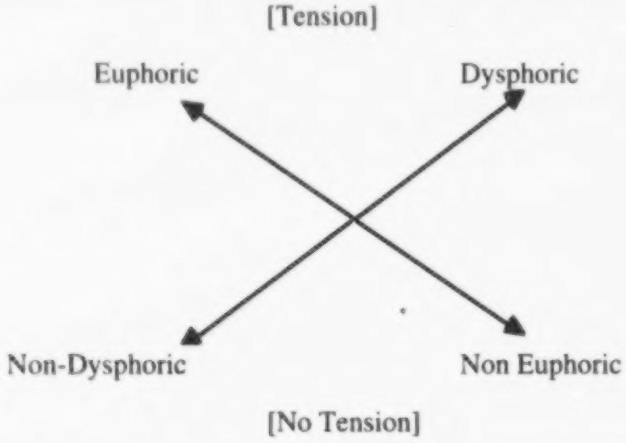
VII. RECOMMENDATIONS AND REMARKS

As we explore in fine detail the workings of euphoric and dysphoric tension, one of the questions which will likely arise in the reader's mind is, "Do we really need to worry about those issues, since overall, students seem to learn a lot and see their experience in a positive light?" Or, to put it in more familiar terms, "If the French School ain't broke, do we need to fix it?"

In order to answer this legitimate question, we must remember what we stated in our preface: our goal was never to verify that the Language Schools are better than the competition, or that they "work," but to understand *how* they work and possibly how they could work *better* --- so that eventually they can be proposed as a model for others to follow.

A) Quality of Tension

The ideal goal of a coherent pedagogical program should not merely be to try and reduce dysphoric tension, but also and more importantly to maximize euphoric tension. It should be emphasized here, though, that one does not imply the other. This means that, if we look at a semiotic square where the thymic category is projected, we realize that the progression from one term to the other does not allow euphoria and dysphoria to be immediately linked, and that, for instance, when the underlying dysphoria is neutralized --- as it happened in 201 because of Charlotte's efforts --- the result is still non-dysphoria, not euphoria.



Thus, when 201 students did not speak of *French in Action* in negative terms, they still did not use positive terms but double negatives, which are a syntactic way of manifesting non-euphoria ("it's not exactly intellectual work") and non-dysphoria ("It's not the worst").

These two values, however, involve no real tension at all, but rather the absence of it. If the Middlebury Language Schools are to offer a model, a prototype for language learning, they cannot be content with the sub-contraries of non-euphoria and non-dysphoria. Since, on the other hand, we know that it is virtually impossible to eliminate dysphoria altogether (partly because its occurrence is so random), it follows that our focus should be the area where we may exert what Dr. Yu refers to as "leverage," in order to promote the euphoric tension which, based on this research, seemed to have favorable effects on the majority of a diverse student population (in terms of personality, background, work ethic, human interactions, etc.).

Consequently, this is, as we have stated, a qualitative issue, since euphoric tension is meant to enrich --- rather than just quantitatively intensify --- the learning process. In and of itself, putting a great deal pressure on the students (with the pledge, the amount of work, the high standards) should only be one facet of a global pedagogical strategy to optimize learning. In addition, the *quality* of the students' experience must be improved both within the scope of the instructional curriculum and across the pericurriculum, but most of all by ensuring proactively that there is a high degree of integration between the two.

B) Pericurriculum

The French School pericurriculum, with its remarkable quality and variety of offerings, is crucial to the Middlebury experience; in fact, it would be difficult to duplicate even in a French-speaking country. It should certainly not be regarded as extraneous or dispensable, but as a true counterpart to the instructional curriculum. Because we found it to be so vital to the experience of lower-level students, socialization should be conceived as part of this pericurriculum, not in that it can be prescribed or monitored, but in that it can be encouraged, fostered and facilitated.

It seems essential to take specific and proactive measures to allow beginners full participation in the pericurriculum, which, as we have explained above, implies a greater degree of social integration in the community on both cognitive and affective levels. For example, although the French School does not single out beginners (or anyone else) with identifying marks on nametags indicating language levels, the public injunctions that beginners eat alone at a separate table in the cafeteria, and that others avoid interacting with them for the first two weeks, should *absolutely* be abolished.

On the contrary, graduate students should be instructed to approach their lower-ability schoolmates, as they will find that although the students' language abilities are inferior to theirs, their professional and educational interests are often similar. In fact, the French School currently holds under-utilized resources in the two interns who live in the dormitory amidst undergraduates, but whose mission remains quite vague. In the present state of affairs, they tend to be approached mostly for personal tutoring in technical matters (grammar explanations, test reviews, composition writing) --- sometimes even by graduate students. Yet, because of their intermediate status between student and professor, and their designated position, they are considered approachable by beginners; as a result, they would be ideally suited to serve as facilitators between lower-level students and their more advanced schoolmates.

In fact, this spontaneously occurred as one of the interns who was a former dormitory Resident Advisor, took it upon herself to meet all the beginners and interact with them on a regular basis. As she herself pointed out, however, it was a matter of personal initiative, since her official functions were loosely defined. By contrast, the other intern merely waited for students to come and knock at her door, and thus had less involvement in the life of the students.

We should also question the rationale of mostly giving beginners a roommate of their own language level, and grouping them in the same hallways, since this research has revealed that a great deal of proximity socialization occurs between students living in adjacent rooms. Such grouping creates yet another hurdle in the beginners' struggle to integrate into the Middlebury community, and contributes to what one person has called "The beginner's ghetto".

In addition, though it is true that virtually all students want to speak with those whose language abilities are equal or superior to their own (which we know is naturally impossible), the school should try to discourage such a self-centered approach to learning, and instead foster a spirit of solidarity so that each and every student has a chance to enjoy the Middlebury experience to the fullest.

C) Curriculum

Optimizing euphoric tension within the instructional curriculum means stimulating the students' cognitive abilities in diverse ways, so as to create the kind of learning opportunities they would find appropriately challenging in their native language. This is not a matter of an activity being more or less "difficult," but more or less significant in terms of its relevance to the learners' overall intellectual needs, and more or less demanding in terms of cognitive complexity --- for instance, requiring analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, rather than knowledge, comprehension, or application, as outlined in Bloom's (1956) taxonomy.

Because the instructional curriculum and the pericurriculum should ideally be integrated --- in keeping with the principle advocated by progressive educator John Dewey, that formal learning should always be a real-life experience --- the general philosophy of the French School should be reflected in the language classroom. Since students are expected to communicate meaningfully and intelligently outside of class, they should have equal opportunity to do so in class as well.

It is also possible to establish direct relevance between activities in and out of class (including assessment), if teachers exploit students' pericurricular activities to build personalized assignments, or give them opportunities to develop their own. The *journal* and interview formats in 101 are simple ways of allowing students to bring their out-of-classroom experiences into the course. Other examples might include student-designed projects that reflect their increased cultural awareness and linguistic expertise, as well as divergent classroom activities where students have some control over both form and content.

We recognize that inflicting a tell-and-drill regimen upon language students may not always induce dysphoria: one 201 student claimed pure indifference, *aphoria*, after two weeks on ***French in Action***. Unfortunately, considering the state of language instruction nationwide, many students have come to *expect* such mind-numbing work. It is still not justifiable to persist in maintaining a mechanistic approach to elementary language teaching, when we know that qualitatively better learning can result from a content-based, constructivist curriculum --- especially when we expect our students to eventually turn into intellectually agile, independent thinkers.

D) Student Placement and Transfer

Placement in language courses is never easy, and the two-tiered evaluation system of the French school (written grammar and comprehension exam, interview) proves that it is taken to heart. Although it is basically irrelevant for true beginners, the issue of placement was problematic in 201, where a disparity of levels created a rift between the more and less advanced students. It is therefore conceivable that the placement procedures, which work well for upper-level students, need to be refined for the lower levels, where there are no easily discernable stages.

The exam as it exists should be maintained, but students' backgrounds should be taken into account for placement as well, to avoid grouping those who are learning a foreign language for the first time, and have had very little exposure to it, with those who have considerable experience (often many years) with language study. "Placement" should thus be taken to include transfers in the first few days of the session, in addition to the initial testing.

Requiring one week before transfers may cause a problem in the beginning level classes, since the pace makes it difficult to catch up both academically and socially in a new setting. Potential transfer cases should be identified early on, (and indeed, they were noted in this research as early as the second day of class) and dealt with in the first two or three days of the session. We witnessed the case of two students who had the opportunity to move up to a more appropriate language level, but refused to do so, both for social and academic reasons: friendships had already been forged, and they feared not being able to catch up with the rest of the new class.

In any context, "false beginners" courses often encounter heterogeneity, and the 201 class was no exception, prompting several of its students to refer to it as the "garbage can" for "the misfits," those who could not be squarely placed into another class, and calling for a splitting up of the class into an upper and lower section to accommodate the different language levels. This may well be the kind of problem which has no clear-cut solution, but that should only be another incentive to promote a flexible, personalized approach to learning which could help fulfill the needs of a very diverse student body.

E) Dialogue

As we outlined in section VI. D), the purpose of promoting teacher-student dialogue should not be limited to inducing affective euphoria in the form of a casual, relaxed atmosphere. On the other hand, we have already acknowledged that it would be counterproductive to try and give equal attention to whatever suggestion or complaint students happen to voice.

Dialogue seems important first because it is a way of giving students the opportunity to present themselves as individuals, whose life and personalities are not suppressed by the language learning experience. One of the leading motivations for coming to Middlebury is being able to express oneself --- not as a pale copy of a story's character, but as a full-fledged human being. The greatest moments of both cognitive and affective euphoria we witnessed did not originate in academic achievement, but in communicative triumphs where beginners' personalities could shine through.

As we have pointed out before, the fact that such triumphs do occur already should not be taken as a disincentive to try and facilitate them further. Dialogue should not occur parallel to the curriculum, and sometimes in spite of it; it also has to be fully integrated. We observed a great deal of interaction between students and teachers in 101 and 201, much more than in any other formal learning environment; herein lies another key to the uniqueness of the Middlebury experience. If, then, the quantity is quite satisfying, the quality can be improved by changing from a curriculum conceived traditionally as a mostly self-referential academic construct, to a curriculum conceived and implemented as a real-life setting.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Because of our chosen format of ethnographic research, we did not know what this report would be like when we started the project, nor did we expect to obtain any sensational findings, since we were already very familiar with the setting of the Middlebury Language Schools.

In the course of listening, observing, but also discussing between ourselves, reflecting on the data, reading relevant studies and fine-tuning our methodology, we did, however, fundamentally alter the way we looked at the issues at hand in the setting we were studying. The very formulation of our original research question proved unsatisfactory, and we found ourselves grappling to redefine what we were examining --- stress then, tension now ---, realizing in the process that its role in language acquisition was even less predictable than we had anticipated, and that the usual treatment of "anxiety" in the literature only represented the proverbial tip of the iceberg. We realized that we had to look below the surface, then, at the heart of the Middlebury experience: the "mystique."

Beyond its obvious elements, the Middlebury mystique seems to reside within itself. People who come to a Language School do so in part because they believe that it "works," or at least that it works better than other similar programs; they arrive in Vermont with the ideal frame of mind --- confident that they too will learn, and they do learn remarkably well and fast.

However, what we can consider to be Middlebury's trademark, a pericurriculum interwoven with an instructional curriculum, remains somewhat problematic. Although the pericurriculum is full of wonderful learning opportunities, it is not at all experienced in the same way by all students, as we have seen. We were quite surprised to discover that the apparently casual interaction of all French School participants concealed some very solid partitions among groups, lower- and upper-level undergraduates, graduates and faculty.

Within that pericurriculum, we saw examples of students thriving in their enjoyment of pericurricular activities --- from simple attendance to movies or plays to partying and performing ---, and of students who felt almost completely shut out of everything but a language lab booth for five hours a day after as many hours of class. The already considerable efforts at planning and advertising expanded by the French School were often not enough to draw those students from their isolation; it became clear that available opportunities were simply not equally available to all members of the community.

Naturally, it can be argued that, in this respect at least, Middlebury is like life itself, where conditions and experiences are rarely equal for all. In fact, there are two, irreconcilable schools of thought on the distribution of educational resources: make them available to all in the same way, or favor those who have an initial handicap. In the case of the French School beginners, it is clear that, if all students are to draw roughly equal benefits from their summer session, a policy of differentiated support has to be put in place.

We also witnessed both an instance of attempted integration between instructional curriculum and pericurriculum, and another of almost complete disjunction between them. Although these two courses took essentially opposite approaches to teaching French, there were students who excelled in both, *and* who did poorly in both. What seemed to link all those students was a remarkable resilience in the face of extreme tension, dysphoric and euphoric, cognitive and affective. They found ways to maintain their equilibrium through seven weeks of very intense work, and to learn --- sometimes *because* of the course, sometimes *in spite of* it.

One aspect which manifested itself most prominently, though, was the enormous amount of goodwill from students as well as teachers, although these various efforts did not always prove well-directed or compatible with the course curriculum and philosophy. Nevertheless, the role of the human element, both in social interactions and in the individualization of the learning experience, cannot be emphasized enough. This holds true for students, but also for the faculty and the administration: the tone set by the director can be felt throughout the school; quite obviously, he is largely responsible for the equilibrium that manages to reign, even though that the summer of 1994 was described by many as one of the more chaotic sessions the school has had in recent years.

If we disregard a few situations and events which were admittedly atypical, what we observed can be considered as a normal Middlebury experience for beginners, inasmuch as any experience can be termed "normal." What seems certain is that we did have the opportunity to examine a great variety of both dysphoric and euphoric tension, which helped us develop the concepts and grounded theories included in this report.

Finally, it should be noted that our recommendations are made for the purpose of improving the *nature* of learning experience for the Middlebury beginning French students; as we stated before, we do not consider that learning is a product which can be improved by using a better method, but a personal growth process which can be helped or hindered and, most of all, optimized in its quality, rather than maximized in its quantity.

While we do not intend these recommendations to be taken to the letter, we hope that they will lead to an increased understanding of the mutually-influencing roles between the formal instructional curricula and the pericurriculum so that both can be designed in concert, and thus be supportive on all learning levels and for all members of the Middlebury community. We hope that our findings will be helpful in further developing the euphoric quality of the Middlebury experience, in order to make it both a theoretically sound and empirically validated model for language acquisition nationwide.

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APPENDIX

MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE
ECOLE FRANÇAISE

* * *

GUIDE DE
L'ETUDIANT DEBUTANT

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BEGINNER'S GUIDE

Prepared by Guy Spielmann
1994

Bienvenue à l'Ecole Française!
Welcome to the French School!

As a beginning student of French in the Middlebury summer program, you will undoubtedly enjoy one of the most rewarding learning experiences in your life. This guide is designed to help you become acquainted as early and as easily as possible with the features of our program.

READ IT carefully, and KEEP IT with you when you come to Middlebury this summer. It will serve as a reference guide and may help you find answers to questions arising as you start your course of study. On the Sunday before classes start, there is an information session during which your instructors tell you more about what awaits you; bring up your questions then, because there will be no more English spoken to or by professors and other officials of the School after that.

The Beginners' Program: An Overview

The purpose of this program is to develop to its largest possible extent a competency in producing and comprehending the French language, both spoken and written. The main focus of classes is on oral communication as an interactive process, which generally requires a much greater effort to master than reading and writing, and is usually under-stressed in language courses. Our other distinctive focus in on the codependance of language and culture, which is rarely well understood and more rarely yet integrated in instruction.

During the seven-week session, you will be exposed to an amount of material normally spread over three or four semesters in college; however, the benefits you will reap from this program are incomparable with those typically offered by a college course. This is due to our approach, which favors active and cooperative learning, and focuses your work on realistic, meaningful practice based on a wealth of authentic documents. There are no drills or abstract grammatical exercises, no memorization of vocabulary lists, and no translations.

In addition, what you have just learned and practiced in class comes alive immediately as you step out into the francophone-only environment of the French School. From the very first day, you have to pay very close attention --- in and out of class --- to what is being said or done around you, and learn how to infer the meaning of words, phrases and sentences from the context, with no reliance whatsoever on English. In this way only can you develop your natural ability to comprehend language as it authentically occurs, and to produce it yourself with equal authenticity. Your instructors are French natives who speak in a normal tone of voice and at a regular pace, as they would to address other native speakers. This guarantees that you will not even have a chance to a) try and understand every single word of what you hear, and b) try and translate from or into English, both of which make you progress painfully slow.

Unlike all other French School students, you are not required to take a placement test upon arrival, because we take for granted that you have not studied French before. However, some students may have had previous contact with French, and know a little more than others. Our experience is that such initial discrepancies level off after five to ten days. If, in the first week, you feel that you are ahead or behind some of your classmates, be aware that the situation will change very quickly; do not feel either overly confident or panicked.

Although you are not required to sign l'*Engagement d'Honneur* --- the French-only pledge --- until the end of your second week, you will not be treated differently from all the other students: no one will speak English to you. Our advice is that you simply behave as if you had signed the pledge, which is what most of our past students have chosen to do. In fact, not doing so only means isolating yourself from the rest of the school community, but most of all losing out on one of the greatest advantages of being at Middlebury: the availability of dozens of French speakers eager to interact with you!

Materials

Although we use the *French In Action* video tapes, we do not follow the method, which involves a great amount of pattern drills and other structural exercises. To us, the 52-episode series is a pretext and a pre-text, which introduces vocabulary, grammatical and cultural structures, idioms and communicative strategies within a continuous story and with recurrent characters.

French In Action publishes a textbook, which provides a script for the film and additional resources, and a workbook in two volumes. You are also required to purchase a dictionary, the *Larousse Maxi-Débutants*, which offers a wide vocabulary with simple definitions, and numerous color illustrations, including panoptic scenes. Since the *French In Action* books offer little in the way of explicit, organized grammar, we suggest that you purchase *La Grammaire en tableaux*, a handy grammatical guide which is well adapted to our approach. Should you prefer a more in-depth presentation of grammar, you will find at the campus bookstore a wide selection from the book lists of other French School classes.

Do not, however, bring or purchase a grammar book that is not completely written in French, or a bilingual dictionary. We are adamant in our refusal to tolerate the use of bilingual or English-only materials, because they are antithetical to rapid and authentic language acquisition. All they can achieve is reinforce your tendency to think of French in terms of English, and to stay addicted to the illusory feeling of mastery that translation provides. Remember that the longer to maintain your dependence on English, the longer and more difficult it will be for you to function comfortably in French.

Daily Schedule

Class meets five hours a day, five days a week: in the morning from nine to noon, and in the afternoon from one-thirty to three-thirty, with short breaks. One morning, usually Monday, will be devoted to personal interviews. Meals are taken in a French-only dining hall and at designated hours; you do have ample time to eat before or after class. You may not eat during class, but it is a good idea to have something to drink always handy.

No absence is possible, except in case of debilitating illness or grave emergency. Any missed class time means falling behind, and experience shows that you may never be able to fully catch up for the rest of the session.

Your class will number approximately a dozen students; you will be required to be active and participate at all times, whether you speak, listen, read or write. This is a very demanding course, both intellectually and physically; the general recommendation that you should arrive at Middlebury in good health and well rested is particularly valid for beginners.

In addition to class time per se, you normally have to work in the lab with the audio cassettes and the workbook which accompany *French In Action*; however there are no specific assignments, nor is this work compulsory (we do not check on it at all). What is important is that you keep up with the pace of the course and complete successfully whatever assignments are given. This is typically achieved by three to five daily hours of out-of-class work. Some people find that working with the tapes and the workbook is the best approach; others prefer an alternative, perhaps more personal way to reach the same goal. The lab offers a abundance of audio-visual resources, which may be better suited to your own learning style; look into them as soon as classes start.

For the first two weeks, it may be safer to work with the *French In Action* materials, until you feel more secure with the language and start venturing in different directions. Our only requirement is that you review each evening what we did in class during the day (vocabulary, grammatical and cultural structures, idioms, communicative strategies); the course follows a spiralling pattern, where items are constantly re-introduced, and recycled in many ways before we expect you to actually remember and use them with ease. Good ideas for alternative work is to go watch the French news which are rebroadcast via satellite every evening, and browse through books, newspapers and magazines at the library.

Attitude

While in class, you are expected to pay attention constantly and to engage immediately in whatever activity is assigned by the instructor. It is important for you to be aware that your success in this program depends predominantly on your own effort and involvement. Strictly speaking, we cannot teach you French --- we give you the best environment, materials, methods and support available so that you will learn it as efficiently and quickly as possible. We believe that students should above all be independent learners and thinkers, and as such take responsibility for their own educational experience.

To ensure optimal benefits from the class and your stay at the Ecole Française, you should always maintain a productive attitude:

OBSERVE your surroundings. Your limited command of French will make it indispensable that you develop comprehension strategies to deal with your immediate environment, and to understand what is expected of you in class. Study the gestures people make as they talk; watch others who may know more than you do, and use them as models. As soon as you can, ask for clarifications or explanations --- in French! **Do not ask in English**; you will not get an answer.

LISTEN very attentively to what is said by your instructor, the characters of *French In Action*, the voices on the tapes... and the people around you at the French School. Take as a ground rule that you absolutely need to understand quickly the **general** meaning of messages; resist the urge to identify each word separately, or to translate anything into English (in many cases, there will be no time to do that anyway!). Try to associate meaning directly with what you see and hear, so that you may develop an understanding of French "from the inside".

SPEAK as much as you can, even if you make mistakes --- you will make plenty of mistakes anyway, and we consider them a necessary part of the learning process. Do pay attention to correct usage, and you will learn from your errors. The Ecole Française is no place for bashfulness: speak in class and outside of class, to your fellow students of all levels and all ages, to the professors, their spouses and children. Do not wait to called upon to speak in class; feel free to volunteer your responses, statements, remarks and opinions. Always remember that the superior language learner is always a risk-taker.

As you will discover, the format of the class allows for constant participation by all students. In many instances, you will be asked to work in small groups and interact with two or three or your classmates directly, while the instructor acts as a consultant. When a small-group activity is announced, team up with your partners quickly (you can usually choose partners) and start to work immediately, without further prompting.

Evaluation

Our evaluation system is primarily designed to monitor your progress and reveal any areas of particular concern on which you should work. We are not interested in merely passing or failing students; we want all of them to reach their full potential as learners and draw the maximum benefits from the course.

Our grading scale is strict, so that an "A" is only given for truly outstanding work, "B" and "C" for above-average and satisfactory work, "D" and "F" for marginal or unacceptable work. We believe, however, that a grade is only a rough measurement of performance on a particular test, and as a result we assign many of them (28 in all) on a broad range of formats (oral and written, divergent and convergent activities). Our goal is to reflect as best as possible your overall performance, without giving undue emphasis to a specific facet of it; this is fundamentally different from regular college grading schemes, which mostly evaluate the ability to memorize vocabulary and perform grammatical exercises.

If you are not progressing satisfactorily, however, we will approach you and make specific suggestions for improvement. Our golden rule is to ensure that no student is allowed or left to fall significantly behind the rest of the group, and to pursue every available avenue to afford everyone a fruitful learning experience, regardless of the grades earned. What we expect in return is a willingness to listen to our advice and follow it.

Every week, there are four graded forms of assessment:
- a *contrôle* done in the lab, and requiring a response --- orally or in writing --- to an audio and/or visual message. This is a real-time activity, with a normal speech pace and no repetition, thus requiring a good deal of concentration. (approx. 30 mn.)
- a short, written *contrôle sur table*, which requires to demonstrate reading comprehension and contextual use of essential vocabulary, grammatical structures, idioms and communicative strategies. (approx. 15 mn.)
- a personal, free-form interview with both of your instructors (approx. 15 mn.)
- a journal due every Friday.

The journal is a diary or scrapbook in which you write on a topic of your choice; you can narrate events which happened during the week, tell about yourself, your friends or relatives, and even write original stories or poems if you so desire. The point is to demonstrate in your own personal way how you can use the French you have learnt thus far for personal expression. Although there are no formal guidelines for the journal, we expect it to reflect, in form and content, the degree of linguistic sophistication at which we have been working that week. In the first two weeks, this may mostly be limited to "telling" (about yourself, your life, your family, etc...) with single and double-clause sentences. We do expect you to progress quickly to narratives with complex sentences and paragraphs, and eventually to abstract topics showcasing a full palette of communicative strategies.

Our best samples, written in the last two weeks of the session, have been quite elaborate essays, which frequently reflect on the learning experience at the school, or a number of social, psychological, aesthetic or emotional issues of particular significance to the author. In any case, it is recommended that you try a number of genres and styles; do not exclusively write dialogues or expository narratives, for example. Although we are not pretending to judge your writing in general, you should avoid, after the second week, turning in journals which are haphazardly constructed, rambling, repetitive and consistently simplistic or sketchy.

At the end of the session, you and two or three classmates will write and perform *un sketch* --- a short play or skit, which we will videotape. There will be a global grade for each group.

Nearly all grades are determined through a collaborative process between both instructors. Since presence and participation are taken for granted, there is no separate grade for them, although the level of each student's involvement with class activities will be taken into account in the fine-tuning of final grades.

Faculty

Your instructors are native speakers of French with extensive teaching experience in an American setting; they assure you of cultural and linguistic authenticity, while remaining sensitive to your needs as students. They keep no "office hours" --- in fact, they have no offices; the entire campus serves that function, and you will have many opportunities to see your instructors outside of class. Do not hesitate to bring up matters of concern, or schedule a private meeting if you wish to discuss specific issues. Be advised, however, that communication in English will only be tolerated in cases of serious emergencies, and then only on a limited basis. Any explanations or assistance with linguistic or academic matters will be delivered in French.

Although they are extremely available, your instructors are not supposed to act as private tutors. The faculty of the Ecole includes two graduate interns, whose duty it is to assist students with their work. Get to know them; they can be extremely helpful to you. They are housed in your residence, and you can make arrangements to meet with them individually or in groups. Please remember that the interns are not allowed to interact with you in English, or do your homework in your place; use their services judiciously!

The Pledge

You will undoubtedly hear much about the *Engagement d'Honneur*, the pledge taken by all Middlebury language students to speak their target language exclusively. It is a very important feature of the immersion principle guiding the school, which students and teachers alike recognize as essential to the success of the program.

The rule is simple: you pledge to speak only French at all times, whether in class, in the dining hall, in the shower or on the tennis courts. This means that you should not purposefully put yourself in situations forcing you to speak English, like calling your relatives on the phone, for instance. The only tolerance is for communication outside of the college with the townspeople of Middlebury and environs; even that is discouraged, however.

Socializing

The Ecole Française represents a community of over three hundred people, with extremely diverse backgrounds and interests. The fact that you are a beginner should not prevent you from associating and socializing with fellow students of all ages and levels, professors, staff members and even the young francophone children who are always present (and running around!).

Tell people that you are a *débutant(e)*, and in most cases you will win their immediate sympathy - they realize the difficulty of living in an all-French environment when you have a very limited command of the language. We have been experimenting with a loosely organized mentoring system, whereby more linguistically proficient students put in an extra effort to help you integrate while you French is still limited. In the first few days, you will do a lot of listening, nodding your head and answering with *oui* or *non*; that is also part of your learning experience. Try to join in activities which revolve around something else than just conversing: games, sports, music, outings...you will benefit linguistically as well.

You may also want to participate in one of the events which brings together students, professors and all others: plays, *le cabaret* (a talent night), *le foot* (our soccer team was undefeated in 1993!), choral and folk singing, as well as other miscellaneous sports and assorted games. In years past, beginners have taken part in all of these activities, and in so doing have had a chance to interact *en français* with a wide variety of people.

In Conclusion...

The Ecole Française has much to offer beyond classes: films, lectures, parties, sing-alongs and myriad other events are listed weekly in *La Nouvelle Gazette* (our newsletter), each representing a learning opportunity. As a beginner, your progress from the first day to the last will be among the most spectacular in all of the student body, going from zero to a level of French unobtainable anywhere else in such a short amount of time. Your gains will be proportional to your dedication, and we hope that in the end you will look back at those seven eventful weeks and say, as many of your tired but happy fellow students, "*Ça valait la peine!*" --- It was well worth the effort.

A bientôt! ....